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VÉRONIQUE.

A Romance.

BY

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"Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,
'Tis woman's whole existence."

BYRON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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VÉRONIQUE.

CHAPTER I.

A RECALL TO ENGLAND.

For the next fortnight, notwithstanding his former protestations to the contrary, Gordon Romilly tasted as much honey as can possibly be digested during a single moon. As soon as she believed herself to be unalterably and entirely his, Véronique cast off the shy reserve, which to the last day of her maiden life she had maintained towards him; and without in the least degree intrenching on the barriers of modesty, gave full play to the ardour of her feelings, and let her husband read every thought of her simple heart. Without books or papers or anything to distract his attention from his new-made wife,

Captain Romilly spent all his hours by her side, strolling about the hills with her in the mornings, sitting in the sunny patch of garden during the afternoons, and smoking his pipe in company with Père Joseph in the evenings, whilst Véronique's smooth braided head was laid caressingly against his knee, and her bright eyes anxiously watched his countenance, in order to anticipate his wants. Her womanly character unfolded beneath the warmth of his affection, as a rich red rosebud bursts into being from the kisses of the sun, and every day he discovered something which he thought more loveable, in the disposition of his wife. While, as for Véronique, no hero, immortalised by history or religion, could compare in her idea with the fascinations of the handsome Englishman who had deigned to stoop to pluck her, and wear her in his bosom.

"How handsome you are, my Gor-don," she naively exclaimed one day, as the A.D.C., extended on his back upon the sward, with a wide-awake slouched over

his face, was busily employed, as usual, in fumigating the surrounding atmosphere. "I thought when I first saw you with your bright hair and brighter eyes, you were the handsomest man that I had ever met."

"You'll spoil me, Véronique, if you go on like this," replied Romilly as he lifted a portion of his hat to meet the admiring gaze bent upon him, "you mustn't make such a fool of me, little woman, or I shall become unbearable, for my friends say I am quite conceited enough as it is."

"Your friends!" responded Véronique with a pretty indignation, "what can your friends know of you, Gor-don, in comparison with *your wife?*" these two last words with a grand assumption of dignity, "you are not conceited; you do not think enough of yourself! your hair is beautiful; when the sun shines on it, as now, it appears like threads of gold, and your eyes are blue as my sapphire ring, and as open and clear as those of a little child."

"A flattering comparison," laughed Ro-

milly, "considering that children are my peculiar detestation."

"You will no longer detest them when you have children of your own," said the youthful matron gravely; "you will love them as much as you love me, Gordon."

"Well, I hope that test of my natural amiability is a long way off, Véronique," replied her husband. "I don't want to divide the love of my little girl with anyone; not even babies."

"But that is a selfish wish of yours, my Gor-don. I, on the contrary, should like to have six sons, all tall as yourself, with the same blue eyes and golden hair. Ah! how proud I should be of them!"

"Heaven preserve us!" exclaimed Captain Romilly, "limit your desires a little, Véronique, for pity's sake, or you'll make me draw out my clasp-knife on the spot and put an end to my miserable existence."

And then she would fling her white

arms about him, and shower kisses on his eyes and lips and hair, whilst she assured him again and again, that she wanted nothing and nobody to make her happy except his own dear self.

But once, as in the fulness of contentment, she was babbling of her innocent pride in him, and Romilly called her jestingly, "*une petite menteuse,*" all her vivacity seemed to disappear as though by magic.

"*Gor-don, tu ne le crois pas?*" she said with dilated eyes, painfully anxious to be reassured.

"Of course I do!" he replied smiling, amused at her taking his idle words in earnest. "You don't suppose I'm such a goose as to believe all you tell me, Véronique."

"*Mais—mais—*" she commenced pleadingly.

"Speak English, Mrs. Romilly," interposed the A.D.C.

"You cannot mean in real," she continued, talking brokenly, as she invariably

did when she had not sufficient time to consider her sentences, "you cannot mean for truth, Gor-don, that you believe me not. I say not what I think not, and if I am so fool as to give you praise more than is your due, still it comes from my heart, it does, indeed!" and Véronique, to his intense surprise, finished her appeal in tears.

"Why, my little woman, what is this?" he exclaimed with real concern, as he drew the sobbing girl down by his side.

"I could not live—I could not bear to live, Gor-don," she answered weeping, "if thou didst not think me true. To tell a lie, even by flattery or insinuation, is always in the sight of Heaven, a crime; and doubly so when it is against those we love —I could not lie to thee, *mon bien-aimé*. Thou knowest every thought of my heart, Gor-don, as I know thine; and couldst thou think otherwise, I should, indeed, be wretched! Were *we* to deceive each other, where could truth be found?"

Her words so stung his already uneasy conscience, that he had none wherewith to

answer her, and almost, then and there, confessed the truth. But Véronique mistook his silence. Not the least suspicion of his perfect honesty had ever assailed her mind; and now, feeling his warm caresses on her brow, she accepted them as pardon for her weakness, and therefrom arrived at the conclusion that her husband thought that pardon was required.

"Forgive me, Gor-don!" she said springing from her position, "forgive me that I am so much a child, and frightened by a passing shadow. You will never seriously distrust me, will you, dearest? and as for me, I have as much faith in your love and truth as I have in heaven."

Her faith, at this time, in her husband, did, indeed, appear to be illimitable. No Circassian slave, living on the smiles of her lord, the Sultan—no bondsman, bound to follow and to obey—no dog that comes like lightning at his owner's whistle—could be more deferential, more submissive, more humbly affectionate, than Véronique, in those first bright days of married life. She

seemed to exist but in her master's smile, to note his words as laws from heaven, to hang upon the expressions of his love for her with so much eagerness, that when he gave them, they oftener made her weep than smile, so deep lay the emotions which they stirred. Gordon Romilly, who never until then, had had such opportunity of studying a woman's character, was surprised to find, that under the pure face and inartificial manners of the girl whom he had married, lay a nest of varied passions, which began to stir their wings and jostle one another beneath the influence of his own. Love, jealousy, indignation, anger and repentance passed as rapidly through her impulsive little heart as he chose to provoke their existence, and each one found so ready a reflection on her speaking features that it was impossible to misinterpret the feeling. One moment Véronique would be childishly gay, dressing herself up the absurdest of figures with grass, and flowers, and leaves, and bursting into successive peals of laughter as she called upon her

husband to see what a lady she was, and to say what his friends would think of "Mrs. Gordon Romilly," the next, at a word or a look from him which she translated into disapproval, she would throw all her finery of flowers away, and cast herself across his knees with an air of deep dejection, and big uplifted eyes which silently implored her lord to smile again and let her be forgiven. He was truly her lord—lord of her soul as of her body—he could move the strings which worked her facile mind with a movement of his little finger, and she would have sacrificed her life to preserve his from injury, and thought herself well paid for her devotion by knowing he was safe.

One day, as they were sauntering together, far from the little bungalow, and Véronique, with both hands clasped above his arm, was hanging on his murmured words of love, Romilly suddenly felt her stop and grasp him like a vice; and looking up, he beheld, standing in the narrow path before them, an enormous "cheetah." Horrified at the sight, (for with the excep-

tion of a light cane he was totally unarmed) he was about to exclaim aloud, when her presence of mind recalled him to a sense of the danger he was incurring.

"*Tais toi,*" she whispered, firmly, "*et regarde-le.*"

She edged herself before him as she spoke, and fixing her eyes steadfastly upon the panther's, glared at him immoveably, as also did her husband, for the space of about a minute, which seemed to them an hour. For a full minute the beast returned their gaze, evidently as disconcerted at the unexpected *rencontre* as they were, and then opening his jaws to their fullest extent, he gave a hissing snarl, half-bred of fear, at them, and with a sullen lash of his tail, leapt down the hill, upon the side of which they had been walking, and trotted off to a neighbouring sholah without once looking back upon his natural enemies.

Captain Romilly gazed after the retreating form of the panther with a sensation of horror which almost seemed to paralyse his faculties, until he was recalled to the

deliverance which had been granted them, by the excited accents of his wife.

"*Ah! mon Gor-don!*" she exclaimed, as with glowing eyes and flushed cheeks, she threw herself upon his breast, "*pour t'atteindre il aurait fallu qu'il pásse sur mon cadavre,*" and saying thus, dropped fainting at his feet.

Romilly thought at that moment that never before had he read the full extent of her devotion for him, and lifting the senseless form which contained a heart, at once so timid and courageous, in his arms, had carried it all the way home before Véronique was again aware of the peril she had passed through. And then her gratitude was reserved, not for her own preservation, but for his.

"Thou art safe!" she murmured, contentedly, as she sunk off to sleep with her head upon his breast, and believed that it was not in the power of Heaven to grant her a more exceeding happiness than was conveyed by that knowledge.

But when Captain Romilly had been

feasting upon honey for rather better than a fortnight, he remembered that there must be letters and newspapers lying for him at the Ootacamund club, and announced his intention of riding into cantonment for the purpose of fetching them. Véronique came out to the garden gate to see him start.

"You will not be long, my beloved!" she said, coaxingly, as she fondled the hand which patted her blooming cheek. "You will soon come back to me!"

"Very soon, darling," he answered, "before two hours are over our heads. And is there nothing I can bring my little woman from Ootacamund?"

"Nothing but thyself!" she said, earnestly; and then he laughed at her, and called her a little fool, and said she would soon find out that married ladies had other wants beside their husbands, and rode off, leaving Véronique shaking her head vehemently, in denial of so treasonable an assertion. The A.D.C., as he expected, found quite an accumulation of letters,

bills, and newspapers waiting him in the reading-room of the club; and breaking their seals, one after another, in the rapid careless manner peculiar to himself, was soon eagerly employed skimming their heterogeneous mass of contents. He had just commenced to read a few lines in the handwriting of his eldest brother, when one of his Ootacamund acquaintances sauntered into the room and recognised him.

"Holla! Romilly! back again? Why, where have you been hiding yourself all this time?"

"Oh! out in the jungle," replied Romilly, with an indifferent air, not caring to pursue the subject too closely.

"Well, if you can find enough game on the hills now to occupy your gun for three weeks, you must be much luckier than I am. Had good sport?"

"Excellent!" said the A.D.C., still busy over his correspondence, but with rather a perturbed countenance.

"What did you bag?"

"Oh! lots of things; but you must ex-

cuse me, Daniells, for the present. I have got a letter here which is of the utmost importance, and I must go over to the hotel to answer it." Saying which, Gordon Romilly left the club reading-room, and with the papers in his hand, sought the apartment, the use of which he still retained at the Ootacamund hotel. As soon as he arrived there, he spread out the crumpled letter, the perusal of which had seemed so to disturb him, and read it over again. It was as follows :—

"Eaton Square, London,
"April 25th.

"My Dear Gordon,

"I regret to inform you that the health of our father has declined so rapidly during the last few weeks, that, although not in immediate danger, his doctors begin to entertain grave doubts as to the termination of the disease. Under these circumstances, he desires that you will at once apply for six months' leave home, on urgent private affairs, which he feels confident the

Governor will grant you as soon as he understands the necessity of the application. I enclose you a bill on his Lordship's bankers for a couple of hundred pounds, in case you should, as usual, be short of funds. Our brothers, Stanhope and Preston, have already been to town to see their father, but Stanhope's leave was necessarily short, and it is impossible that Preston can quit his incumbency for more than a parson's week. In conclusion, I suppose I need scarcely urge on you a ready compliance with what may be the last request your sole surviving parent makes to you; but should any be required, you will find it perhaps in the fact that delay on your part may seriously affect your future interests. His Lordship has, to my knowledge, left you in a very comfortable position; but so quick is he to interpret any indolence from you as a proof of disobedience, that I believe it would take but a little thwarting in this matter to make him draw his pen through your name. Therefore, for your

own sake, start as soon as possible after receiving this letter.

"With kind regards from my wife,

"Believe me,

"My dear GORDON,

"Yours sincerely,

"ERSKINE ROMILLY."

Captain Romilly read this letter through two or three times before he could fully make up his mind to believe that he must quit Ootacamund at once. But he knew from the date on which the next Calcutta steamer was expected at Madras, that if he intended to sail by her, he must set off on his journey that very night. It was, to use his own familiar language, "deuced hard," but it would be still worse if he delayed, and by that means lost the chance of supporting himself and Véronique in the position to which he had raised her. He said in the words of another son, some hundreds of years ago: "The days for the mourning of my father are at hand," and consoled himself with the after-thought, "then will

I acknowledge my marriage with Véronique."

He spent another hour at the hotel, putting together the few things he had left there, paying what he owed, and making his arrangements for starting by "transit" that same evening; and then he remounted his pony, and with the fatal letter in his hand, rode away, with a flushed face, to break the news to his poor little wife. She was watching for him when he arrived—hanging over the palings, and straining her eyes to catch the first glimpse of his figure, and when she saw it she ran along the mountain path to meet him, and climbing up on the broad back of the sturdy Pegu, rode home behind him, as delighted as a child.

"Are you not well?" she enquired, anxiously, when they had dismounted, and she caught a glimpse of his forlorn countenance, "have you a head-ache? you have been too much in the sun!"

"No, Véronique! there is nothing the matter, but I have heard some news which

has disturbed me, and I had better tell it to you at once. Come with me!"

He took her hand as he spoke, and led her, trembling with alarm, into their own room, and then he shut the door, and folded her in his arms.

"My little woman!" he commenced, (he never designated her his "wife," but that omission she was too trusting to observe), "do you know that my leave here will very soon be up—that it was only for sixty days at the commencement."

"But you can get an extension, Gordon," she exclaimed, quickly, "have you not often told me that you would apply for one?"

"Yes! I know I have; but that's just what I want to speak to you about, my darling," he replied. "I can't get an extension, Véronique, because I have received a letter from home to say my father is dangerously ill, and wants to see me, and I must apply for leave to England, instead."

"To England! oh! take me with you,

Gor-don," she said, clinging to him like a terrified child, "do not leave me behind, or I shall die!"

"I wish I could, my darling," he answered, straining her to his heart, "but how is it possible? have you forgotten that our marriage is a private one?"

Her hands dropped passively to her side, and her face assumed an expression of despair.

"And when will you come back to me?" she whispered, hoarsely—

"Very soon, I hope, my darling! as soon as ever I can, you may depend upon that; and meanwhile you must be good, and stay here patiently with Père Joseph until I can return to fetch you—will you do so much for my sake, Véronique?"

"I will try to be patient," she answered, wearily, "when must you go?"

"To-night!"

But at this she gave way to a fresh passion of grief.

"To-night! — oh! not to-night! — oh! my Gor-don, stay by me—leave me not;

your Véronique can never live without you!"

She flung herself upon his breast, she wound her slender arms about him, she watered his face with her tears, and called on all the saints in the calendar to protect her treasure till they met again.

"The sea! the dreadful sea!" she moaned, "you will be drowned; I shall never see you more. Oh! Gor-don venture not upon the cruel sea."

"Why, my darling?" he said, trying to speak lightly, though his heart ached at the sight of her distress, "a truce to all such silly fears. The sea will be your best friend, Véronique; it shall bring me back to you: and as for me, I'd cross it a hundred times in order to find myself again in these dear arms!"

But finding that she could not stem her tears, and that her sobs were becoming almost hysterical, Captain Romilly adopted another line of argument.

"Am I to get ready all alone, Véronique? Is my little girl not going to help

her awkward Gordon with his packing? for I must make haste, my darling—more depends upon the haste I make for you and me than I have leisure at this moment to explain."

She raised her weary face from the shelter of his bosom, as he spoke, and with a deep sigh of patient resignation, stood upon her feet.

"I have been wrong," she said, humbly, "I knew from the first, my Gordon, that I should not have thee ever—and it has been so bright—so bright and beautiful, and heavenly, that I might have guessed it could not last."

"That's nonsense!" he replied, smiling, "it will last for always, darling, and a good deal over that. But my father is in a dying state, Véronique; if you (who are sure to see me soon again) experience so much sorrow at our parting, what must he feel, who, even now, may die before I reach his side?"

He looked into her face as he spoke, and the sad, wistful eyes gazed back at him, as

though they would imprint his features on her mind for ever, but she did not smile.

"I will not vex thee more, 'Gor-don!" was all she said, as she turned to busy herself about her husband's packing, and she kept her word.

Meanwhile, Père Joseph was not near so hard to convince of the necessity of the A.D.C.'s immediate departure as his niece had been. His first surprise at the announcement over, the letter which Captain Romilly had received was placed before him, and, as soon as he had perused it, he perfectly acquiesced in the wisdom of his making no delay in returning to Madras. The object for which he had permitted Véronique to contract a secret marriage with the A.D.C., that she might at some future day be acknowledged before the world as a gentleman's wife, seemed nearer at hand than he had ever hoped it could be, and, during the course of their conversation, Romilly made, what appeared in the eyes of the priest, such liberal arrangements for the comfort of his wife, during

the term of their separation, that before it was concluded, Père Joseph had decided within himself that the recall to England, on such an errand, was the very luckiest thing that could have happened for Véronique, although it might, at first sight, be difficult to persuade her of the fact.

Mr. Erskine Romilly, when he surmised that the funds of his youngest brother would, as usual, have run low, had not been far out of his reckoning ; for ample as was the A.D.C.'s quarterly allowance, he had very little of it left by the time that the letter arrived. With his accustomed thoughtless generosity, he had completely furnished a couple of rooms in the priest's bungalow on the occasion of his marriage, added to which he had naturally indulged himself by making sundry presents of ornaments and articles of clothing to his bride.

These expenditures had tended greatly to reduce his well-filled purse, but he had yet sufficient, with the help of an extra hundred pounds, to take him back to England.

Half of the cheque, therefore, enclosed in his brother's letter, he handed over to Père Joseph, for the use of Véronique, until she should have heard of his arrival at home, and he desired that during his absence, she might continue, under her maiden name, to occupy the rooms which he had furnished for her use, and have a servant kept to do the work which had hitherto fallen to her share.

"When once I find myself in England," he continued, "I will write you word of the position affairs have assumed there, and let you know exactly how soon you may expect me back again, or whether I shall send for Véronique. Meanwhile, here is the address of the Club to which I used to belong, and to which she must send me regular accounts of both her welfare and your own."

The priest considered that nothing could be more liberal or straightforward. He put by the money confided to him, with the reverence due to its amount, and almost chided Véronique for appearing at the last

meal they took together with swollen eyelids, instead of looking glad at the approaching fortune of her husband.

"Women are inexplicable creatures," he said afterwards, as though in apology for her behaviour to the A.D.C., "there is nothing that they love on earth, like money and a good position, and yet they seem to expect that both are to be theirs without any trouble being taken either on their parts, or those of the men. They prate of glory far away, as though the theme could never tire them, but directly it draws near, they rust with their tears the sword they buckle to your side, until it is hardly fit for use or ornament."

But Romilly did not chide her. As they stood together alone for the last time, exchanging passionate kisses and farewells, he was almost ready to mingle his hot tears with hers.

"Farewell, beloved, wear this for my sake," whispered Véronique, as she detached the silver crucifix she always carried in her bosom, and hung it round her lover's neck.

"It is worth but little, my Gor-don, but 'tis the same my mother used, and when you pray, it will bring the remembrance of your Véronique into your heart."

"No fear of my forgetting it, my darling," he replied, as he fondly pressed her in his arms. "I shall think of you both night and day, until we meet again. But meanwhile, what have I to give you in exchange? There is nothing but my watch, and I shall want that on the voyage."

"Hast thou not given me everything?" she answered, hastily, "art thou not my very own? Tell me so, Gor-don, before we part, say that thou art, wholly and irrevocably *mine*, that no other woman can ever come betwixt thee and me, and for awhile I will be content to lose thee."

She gazed into his face, anxiously waiting his reply, with straining eyes that seemed as though they needs must wrest the truth from him.

"By heavens, no!" he exclaimed, and as he said the words he meant them. "You are the first woman, Véronique, that I have

ever truly loved, and you shall be the last. I swear it!"

"*Je suis contente,*" she murmured in a low voice, as, weakened by the emotion she had passed through, a dull film spread itself over her blue eyes until she rested heavy and unconscious against her husband's breast. Gordon Romilly gazed at her for a moment, almost in despair, then laying her quietly on their familiar bed, pressed a dozen kisses on her cold and unresponsive lips, and not daring to trust himself with her any longer, rushed quickly from the room.

CHAPTER II.

EATON SQUARE, S.W.

Arrived at Ootacamund, Captain Romilly bade farewell to Colonel Greene, and the few acquaintances he had made there, with so evident an air of depression that had he not communicated to them the unfavourable news which he had received relative to his father's state of health, they would have been quite at a loss to account for the change in his spirits. As it was, however, Lord Erskine Romilly's condition and the A.D.C.'s sudden recall to England, were quite sufficient to render his words few, and his manner nervous and hurried. So without searching for a further reason they gave him all the assistance in their power, and by the united efforts of his friends and him-

self, Gordon Romilly was packed into a palanquin the same evening, and carried down the "ghaut" to meet the "transit" which awaited him at the foot.

Not before he had found time, however, to write a hasty note to Véronique, (a note which lay against her heart until they met again); in which after imploring her to keep up her courage and her spirits for his sake, he begged her to retain the Pegu pony (which would reach her by its horse-keeper on the following day) for her own use, and let him hear that she both rode it and enjoyed the exercise. And then there was nothing more for him to do there, and with a heavy heart Captain Romilly proceeded on his journey to Madras, which he reached in the course of the next two days.

As his father had anticipated, the A.D.C. experienced no difficulty in obtaining his six months' leave of absence, his services being neither so valuable nor so efficiently performed, as to render the procurement of a substitute a matter for speculation; and

when the next Calcutta steamer puffed out of the Madras roads, she bore away, at once the handsomest and most useless member of the Governor's staff of honour.

The homeward passage was without adventure. Life on board one of the Peninsular and Oriental Company's steam-ships is too familiar to the modern reader to be worthy of description. Everybody knows that on the outward bound, a vast amount of love-making goes on, and a like quantity of squabbling in those that steam the other way: and the ship which carried Captain Romilly as passenger was no exception to the general rule. Two or three young ladies, booked by some accident of circumstance for the wrong quarter of the globe for white satin favours, shewed themselves very desirous of doing a little business whilst they had the opportunity, and to that end, were persevering in their demonstrations towards Captain Romilly, giving him plainly to understand that if he wished to flirt, it need not be with himself. But the married A.D.C. was adamant. He had

not the slightest inclination to flirt, or even to pretend to do so, and was so constant to his cigar and his thoughts of Véronique, that as he paced up and down the deck, smoking, star-gazing, and wondering what his darling was about the while, he felt so sure of himself, and so entirely hers, that he believed his marriage had been the best thing in the world for him, that he was really going to turn over a new leaf in consequence, and be discreet and virtuous for the rest of his existence.

Desirous of making as much haste as possible, Captain Romilly of course adopted the Marseilles route; but on landing at that place he received a letter to inform him that his father was already dead. A sudden and most unexpected increase of the worst features of the disease having set in shortly after his brother's former epistle had been dispatched to him, Lord Erskine Romilly, notwithstanding the efforts of the first physicians in London, had succumbed to the complaint, and been laid in the family vault in Ireland, a fortnight before

the day on which his youngest son heard the news of his demise.

To say that Captain Romilly did not sustain a shock on the receipt of this communication would be to write him down more callous to the serious ills of life than even his artificial rearing caused him to appear. He had not been a particularly dutiful or obedient son; he had often thought and spoken disrespectfully of his father; often been careless of his wishes, and sometimes even acted in direct rebellion to them. Yet he was not worse than hundreds of the rising generation who lash out against parental authority as soon as ever it threatens to interfere with their convenience; who fight for their own way, as babes just out of leading-strings will strive to gain the mastery over their attendants; and persist in considering advice from older heads as another name for thwarting their desires.

Gordon Romilly had said and thought all this, times out of mind; yet when he first heard that his father was dead, gone beyond

recall far out of the reach of receiving kindness from his children, or of hearing them regret they had not always shown it, he would have given much to have him back again, even at the risk of losing his expected inheritance. He might have known that he could not live long to exercise his paternal control, for at the time of his death Lord Erskine Romilly was a very old man; Gordon, who had attained the age of four and twenty, being the youngest of his family.

He was the third son of the Earl of Bournemouth, and his title died with him. An Irish Lord, with no patrimony but such as he derived from Irish ground, Lord Erskine Romilly, like many others of his class, had preferred to live in England, and thus avoid the risk of being shot whilst taking a quiet stroll amidst the bogs and quagmires of his own estates. But the family on both sides was a high one; and, as soon as the young Romillys were old enough to understand the meaning of the injunction, it had been rigidly impressed

upon them by their father, that he would disown them if they ever disgraced themselves by *mésalliances;* and, as far as he knew before his death, none of them had ventured to transgress this law.

Erskine, the eldest son, for whose house Gordon was now bound, had married Lady Maria Sellon, a daughter of the Earl of Tor ; and Preston, the third brother, who held the incumbency of Rolandston in Kent, a living in the gift of his father, had wedded the buxom widow of Sir Calloway Douglas, with twenty thousand pounds for her portion, whose mother, as everybody knew, was nearly allied to three Lords and a couple of Baronets.

Stanhope, a colonel in the Royal Artillery, and a confirmed bachelor, had never given his father a moment's uneasiness with respect to his future ; and the two daughters also had married in their own station of life. It was reserved for Gordon, the youngest-born and the most rebellious, from the irregularity of his habits and the independence of his ideas, to inspire Lord Erskine

Romilly with the dread, that he would eventually disgrace his family by uniting himself with whom and what he chose.

All these things pressed on the memory of the A.D.C. as the mail train conveyed him rapidly from Paris to Calais; and at one moment he penitently wished he could recall his parent to life, if only for a few seconds, that he might assure him he would never again act contrary to his wishes; and the next, remembering Véronique, and the little chance there would have been of gaining his father's consent to such a marriage, Gordon Romilly shuddered to find himself almost rejoicing at the idea that no one's approval but his own could ever again be necessary.

It was in the afternoon that, worn out with travel and emotion, he arrived in Eaton Square. The house, which, like its fellows, could never contrive to look lively, unless the balconies were filled with flowers and a red awning stretched from the hall-door to the outside of the pavement, appeared more gloomy than usual to the

A.D.C., as he glanced up from the closely-curtained lower windows, coated with the dust of a London June, to where the grim hatchment, with its rampant lions, sloped from the drawing-room verandah, completely obscuring the light of its middle casement.

"Is your master at home?" asked Captain Romilly hurriedly of the servant who opened the door to him, and receiving an answer in the affirmative, threw the Hansom-driver his fare, and was shown at once into his brother's private study.

Mr. Romilly, a member of Parliament and by the death of his father an Irish landlord to a very considerable extent, was a man of about five and forty, already bald, slightly grey, and in every respect a great contrast to his fair-haired and fashionable young brother. He had received a telegram from Paris, apprising him of the A.D.C.'s arrival, therefore it was not to be wondered at that he expressed no astonishment at his appearance; yet, although he had not seen him for more than six months

past, he greeted him with as restrained a smile, and as calm a pressure of the hand, as though they had been in the habit of meeting every day.

"We did not expect you quite so soon," said Mr. Romilly, consulting his watch as the A.D.C., having thrown his travelling encumbrances to the servant, stretched himself comfortably in an arm chair. "The mail must be early to-day. What sort of a passage have you had?"

"Pretty well!" was the nonchalant reply, for the Romillys were not an impulsive family, and Gordon did not appear in the least disconcerted by the cool welcome he received; "it was deuced unpleasant, as usual, from Malta to Marseilles, but as I never suffer in that way, it signified little to me."

"Ah, I suppose so. Have you dined?"

"Well, hardly—at three o'clock in the day."

"Lunched, I mean. Shall I order you anything?"

"No, thanks: I can hold on till dinner-

time. How are Maria and the children ?"

"Quite well, thank you. Maria is in town this afternoon shopping. By the way, you received my letter at Marseilles, I suppose ?"

Gordon Romilly's face lengthened.

"Oh, yes. I got it all right. It was rather a shock to me of course. I didn't think it would be so soon."

"No more did any of us. Sir Philip Davidson had guaranteed him for another six months only the week before, and Dr. Money says he had not expected him to give in even by that time. But what reliance is there to be placed on the strength of seventy-five ? My father's constitution was as fine a one as ever man possessed ; but it had been much tried of late, and towards the close it seemed to give way altogether. I was in South Audley Street at the time of his death, so were Stanhope and Preston ; but after the crisis set in he recognised none of us !"

"I am glad of that," said poor Gordon,

"because then he could not have missed myself."

"Oh, dear no! he missed no one," replied Mr. Romilly indifferently, "but you did quite right to start at once. No one could have foreseen so speedy an end, and under other circumstances you might, as I told you when I wrote, have very seriously injured your prospects. As it is you are all right."

The A.D.C. breathed again. He had been longing to put that question from the moment of his entrance, but from motives of delicacy, fearing to appear too eager in the eyes of his brother, had hitherto restrained himself. Now he waited but to be assured that what he had heard was true, to tell his family that he had left a wife in India, and intended to send for her at once. For what his brothers might think upon the subject Gordon Romilly did not care a rush; if his inheritance were no longer to be affected by the confession of his marriage, the sooner they knew of it the better.

"I am glad to hear you say so," he observed in answer to Mr. Romilly's last remark, "for to tell you the truth, Erskine, after what you wrote me out to India I have felt a little anxious about the matter. It would have been a cruel thing, considering the manner in which I have been brought up, if my father had left me penniless."

"Oh! I fancy there was very little chance of that contingency," replied the elder brother, as he rested his elbows on the sides of his arm-chair, and deliberately clasped the fingers of his long, thin hands. "He would have provided for your maintenance under any circumstances, Gordon, although he might not have bequeathed you so liberal a portion as now. As it is, I consider you have every reason to think yourself most fortunate."

"Let me know my fate at once then," said the young man laughing, "for it promises to be of some importance to me."

"I have a copy of the will in my

secretaire, if you would like to peruse it."

"No! not to-day; it would take me hours to arrive at the meaning of a lawyer's deed. Give me an epitome of the will, Erskine, in your own language, and I'll examine the original at my leisure."

"You must be aware," commenced Mr. Romilly in his slow, deliberate manner, "that it would not be possible for a man in the position of my father, to leave legacies to his children in proportion to the allowances he may have made them during his lifetime. Whilst living he gave to those who, in his ideas, most needed assistance, but after his death justice required that all should be fairly and equally dealt by."

"Of course, of course!" said the A.D.C. impatiently.

"Under which circumstances you will not be surprised to hear that I inherit the Rammadroog estates with fifty thousand pounds, that Stanhope takes the farm of Kilsa, with a legacy of thirty thousand,

that Preston has the same sum, retaining his incumbency for life (after which it returns into my gift), and that—"

"Well," exclaimed Captain Romilly breathlessly.

"You are to have the same money as your younger brothers, under one condition—"

"And what is that ?"

"In my opinion, a very reasonable one. You know, Gordon, that you gave your father much cause for fear during your stay in Winchester, that you might suffer yourself at some future period to be entangled in a marriage unworthy of your name; and he has thought proper to provide against such a contingency by the terms of your inheritance. The thirty thousand pounds is left you, unconditionally, on the occasion of your marrying in your own station of life !"

"On the occasion of my marrying !" exclaimed the young officer starting from his seat. "And what if I never marry—what then ? Am I to starve ?"

"Starve, my dear Gordon," replied the other with an incredulous smile; "have you not your profession?"

"My profession! what is that? A beggarly commission that brings me in a hundred and fifty a year, and obliges me to spend six. Why, as it was, my father always allowed me five hundred a year, beside my pay, and devilish hard I have sometimes found it to make ends meet even upon that."

"Then you must be extravagant," remarked Mr. Romilly as though it were the first time the subject had been presented to his notice, "but in the event of your remaining single, Gordon, (which is most improbable, as, of course, you will now consider it your duty to marry) my father has charged me to make you a yearly allowance of two hundred pounds, which, in itself, ought to be sufficient to satisfy the demands of any reasonable man."

"Ought to be sufficient!" growled the A.D.C., "do you know the cost of coats

and trousers, and gloves, and boots, and cigars, Erskine ?"

"Well, considering I have a family," returned his brother, "I ought to do so; but if you dealt with my tradesmen, Gordon, you would find that such things cost you less than they do now. Whether you marry or whether you remain single, it will be better worth your while as you get on in life, to pay less for fashion and more for quality. But you young fellows of the present day never seem to think of such things, until circumstances like these compel you to do so."

Mr. Romilly might have talked on for ever. He was discoursing to deaf ears, for Gordon had again thrown himself into the chair, and with both hands thrust through his hair, and shading his countenance, was gloomily pondering over the news he had just heard.

"Two hundred a year!" he muttered, "it is nothing. My father had better have lived till Doomsday than left me like this;

it is an insult—a mockery! He ought to have been ashamed to do it!"

"He knew well enough what he was about when he drew up that will, Gordon," said Mr. Romilly sternly. "You may remember the trap in which you very nearly permitted yourself to be caught whilst quartered at Winchester, and the little we were able to learn respecting your doings at Madras, was not calculated to make us think you were much steadier whilst there. Your father's great fear to the day of his death, was, lest you should be led into making a *mésalliance*, and consequently he did what he could to guard against it."

"It shews how much he must have known of me," replied the A.D.C., indignantly, "that he could think me capable of taking a common shop girl, with cheeks like nutmeg-graters, and a waist like a tar-barrel, to be my wife. A nice thing for a father to believe of his son. I thought mine had more gentlemanly feeling."

"It is of no use discussing that question

now!" said Mr. Romilly, quietly, "the danger (if there were any) is past, and I trust may never happen again—meanwhile, all you have to do, Gordon, is to look out for a suitable wife for yourself, and enter upon your inheritance as soon as possible. Sooner or later you must marry. No man, who wishes to lead a respectable life, does otherwise; and I think, for my own part, that the earlier you get over that sort of thing, the easier you get accustomed to it. Notwithstanding our mourning, you will have many opportunities of looking about you, before the season closes, and if you make good use of your time, we shall see you a married man before next Christmas."

"I'll be hanged if you do!" exclaimed the A.D.C., energetically, as with a troubled face he rose from the seat which he had occupied, and took up a position by his brother's writing-table. "Whatever happens to me, beggary or disgrace, you may take your oath of one thing, Erskine, no power on earth shall induce me to marry as my father advises."

"What! you are determined not to have a gentlewoman for your wife? You must be mad, Gordon!"

"I am as sane as you are," returned the other, curtly, "and much more so than my father was. What I say is, that I am prepared to marry no one, gentlewoman or otherwise; that I am perfectly satisfied with my present condition, and that I intend to stick to it."

"Follow your own inclination in the matter, of course," said Mr. Romilly, coolly, "but in that case I am only empowered to pay fifty pounds a quarter, to your credit, and judging by myself, I should have thought the alternative a pleasanter one; but I think we have now talked quite enough about the business. You understand exactly how the land lies, and must decide for yourself. Shall I ring for Edwards to show you to your room?"

"As you like!" replied the A.D.C., morosely, and he went to the apartment destined for him, and sat for more than an hour at the foot of the bed, moving neither

hand nor foot, as he reviewed the unpleasant tidings he had received, and wondered how on earth he should struggle out of the predicament in which he found himself.

CHAPTER III.

LADY ROSE.

Two hundred pounds a year, doled out in quarterly instalments by the hands of his prudent brother, Erskine, so long as he avowed himself a bachelor, or thirty thousand, unconditionally his, on the occasion of his marrying a woman from his own sphere of life. To keep his union with the soldier's daughter a secret, therefore, would be to reduce his income to less than half what it had been; to make it known, to lose assistance for the present, and all hope for the future.

As Gordon Romilly contemplated the prospect before him, he told himself he should go mad. Twist the conditions of

his father's will in what way he would, they still remained the same, and nothing stared him in the face except a future of privation and annoyance. There were but two courses open to him, either to return to his staff appointment, and the country he abhorred, or throwing it up, to rejoin his regiment and remain in England, where, if he kept up the appearances he had been used to do, he should spend more than his quarterly allowance between Lady Day and Midsummer. Meanwhile, what was to become of Véronique?

How was it possible that he could either have her home, and support her and himself on captain's pay, or reside in India, keeping her in secret on the Hills, as in the ardour of his love he had at first thought easy?

Seeing the difficulties which beset him upon every side, and seemed to press more heavily the nearer that he contemplated them, Gordon Romilly shut daylight from his eyes, and wished, although too late, he had been dead before his fatal rashness

had been the means of enticing himself and Véronique to their destruction. Roused at last from his painful reverie, by the entrance of a servant with hot water, and the intimation that the first dinner bell would ring in five minutes, Captain Romilly forced himself to stir about again, and change his travelling clothes.

The very fact of being obliged to hasten, cleared some of the depression from his spirits, but his countenance bore a look of gloomy dissatisfaction as, dressed in evening attire, he descended the broad staircase leading to the drawing-room. It was quite a family party that he found assembled there, the recent mourning of the Romillys rendering their temporary seclusion a matter of necessity, but there were sufficient of themselves to prevent the apartment looking empty. His sister-in-law and hostess, Lady Maria Romilly, with her eldest daughter, Ellen, a pretty blushing girl of sixteen, and her youngest sister, Lady Rose Sellon, a handsome blonde, of two or three seasons out, stood on one side of the

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hearthrug, whilst Mr. and Mrs. Preston Romilly, now visitors in Eaton Square, with the brother whom Gordon had already met, occupied the other. They were all standing, for the A.D.C. was late for dinner, and as soon as the first greetings were over, the party moved into the dining-room.

"My dear Gordon!" exclaimed Lady Maria, as she first advanced her cheek for a fraternal salute, and then placed her arm within his, for the purpose of being conducted downstairs, "how well you are looking! I declare you have grown positively handsome. India has not affected your complexion in the least; and if you are a trifle thinner than you were, it is rather an improvement to you. I think you know my sister, Rose! You met her at Compton Grange, didn't you, last year? Now, Preston, if you have finished with your brother, suppose you let him take me into the dining-room, for if we stay here much longer, the soup will not be fit to drink."

Lady Rose Sellon, with whom the A.D.C. had enjoyed a very decided flirtation at her father's country house of Compton Grange, the year before, here advanced her hand for his acceptance, with the remark that she could hardly suppose Captain Romilly *did* remember her, considering how very long ago it was since they had met. To which Captain Romilly gallantly replied that Lady Rose was in herself a sufficient guarantee for not being forgotten, and having earned a bow from the lady in acknowledgment of the compliment, found, when he sat down to the dinner-table, that she occupied the seat next to him.

A well-lighted room (for Mr. Romilly was one of those men who maintain that it is impossible to dine comfortably by daylight), a good dinner, choice wines, and a pretty woman making cordial advances to him on his right-hand side, are powerful incentives for a man to shake off what poor Véronique had called "*les diables bleus.*" However little near or dear his family might be to Captain Romilly's heart, it

was pleasant (especially after absence in a country he abhorred), to find himself amongst them once again, to look round upon the appointments of the table, to listen to the drift of the conversation, to observe the air of good breeding and refinement which pervaded everything, and to feel that he was amongst his own people, in his proper sphere, and as much entitled to all he saw as they were.

It has been plainly shown that Captain Romilly hated India. He had set his face against the country from the first hour he had entered it, and instead of making allowances, as in charity bound, for the want of breeding, and the ignorance of fashion he encountered there, had permitted such puerilities to offend him, as much as though they had been organised for his annoyance, and make him consider his sojourn in the East as a term of penal servitude.

It was this persistence in refusing to interest himself in any diversion which the country could afford him, that had led

Gordon Romilly to seek the company of Véronique as an amusement, and to grasp so eagerly at any means of securing her for himself, when he had reason to fear she might be taken from him.

Such conduct on his part, had, of course, created many enemies. His countrymen in the East had talked almost as much against the insolent affectation of the handsome A.D.C., as he had talked of their barbarity and want of manners; some had even tried to resent it. He disdained to meet any of their advances in a friendly spirit, therefore they left off courting him; he turned up his nose at the poorness of their entertainments, therefore they left off asking him; he accorded so haughty an acquiescence when requested to take a partner from amongst them for the dance, that he was soon left to saunter up and down the ball-rooms by himself, and silently confess the truth of the assertion that "it is not good for man to be alone."

Yet all these little lessons, taught him by experience, had not in one whit softened

Captain Romilly's heart: on the contrary, they had hardened it, and it is difficult to say whether the kicks or the caresses of the people of Madras had most effect upon him. He came back to England still less in love with India than when he went there, and had it not been for the one spot of earth which held his Véronique, he would not have tolerated the country even in his thoughts.

Imbued with such ideas, it is not wonderful that a return to Eaton Square, and all the luxuries and refinements of a first-rate establishment in London, should have had their effect upon the drooping spirits of the A.D.C. He could not shake off the remembrance of what he considered a piece of gross injustice on the part of his late father, but as the good dinner and the good wine began to exercise their influence over him, and turning every moment to encounter the bright glances of Lady Rose Sellon, he inhaled the faint fragrance which floated from her hair and dress, Gordon Romilly felt he was in his element once

more, and, determined that the company should not guess at his discomfiture, made an effort to respond to the cordiality by which he was surrounded.

"Now do tell us something about India!" exclaimed Lady Rose, as soon as enquiries of a more personal character had been discussed and laid aside. "How did you like it, Captain Romilly, with its 'coral strand?' By the way, I hope you remembered to stuff a carpet-bag full of coral before you left, for it is the most fashionable ornament that can be worn this season!"

She was a handsome girl, of about two or three and twenty, tall, broad-shouldered, and full-bosomed, with bright brown hair, and eyes to match, which albeit they were usually kept a little too open to do good service in the cause of bashfulness, Captain Romilly remembered to have thought very attractive on more than one occasion when he had been left alone with her.

"What a pity you did not tell me so, before," he said, in answer to her observation, "when you must have known that

any commands of Lady Rose Sellon's, I should only have been too happy to obey—I might have fished for it over the side of the steamer, all the way home, with a thread and a crooked pin. As it is, I wasted the precious opportunity, and fished for nothing."

"Except compliments, I suppose," said Lady Rose. "Ah! Captain Romilly, that's very pretty talking, but I fancy I have heard you say something of the kind before, and you seem to have kept up the habit so well, that there is little doubt you have been practising during your absence from England. Maria and I were quite astonished, I can assure you, when we heard that you had returned both unmarried and unengaged; were we not, Maria?"

To this appeal Lady Maria Romilly returned a ready affirmative, and the A.D.C. grew hot and uncomfortable under the accusation, and displayed such evident signs of what he was enduring, that the ladies called the attention of the whole table to

his confusion, which was unanimously declared to be a sign of guilt.

"It is of no use trying to deny it, Captain Romilly," continued his lively tormentor, "for your blushes betray you, so it only remains for you to tell us her name, and whether she is dark or fair."

"If she came from Madras, Lady Rose, she would most probably be dark," he replied, struggling to get out of his dilemma, and appear natural at the same time, "but neither Maria nor you can have any idea of the beauties I have encountered in India, or you would not think of laying such an imputation on my taste."

"What! by imagining you capable of admiring the 'Maids of Ind?' What does Moore say of them?" and Lady Rose repeated the lines—

"'All the bright creatures, that, like dreams,
Glide through its foliage, and drink beams
Of beauty from its founts and streams.'"

"I am afraid Moore can have had very little personal knowledge of the subjects of

his verse," said Captain Romilly, laughing, "My experience of the 'Maids of Ind' is, of greasy faces, coarse hair, broad stumpy figures, and flat feet, which added to a not devouring love of cleanliness, and a mouth full of betel-nut juice, make up a picture, I hope sufficiently unengaging, to absolve me in future from your suspicions."

"Oh, fie!" said Lady Rose, "is it possible you can be talking of the fair sex? Captain Romilly, I did not think you could be so impolite. But if it is the case, I suppose you can have little idea of returning to a land so full of savages."

"*Cela depend!*" he answered, carelessly, but with a sigh at the thought of what he had left there: and at that moment the ladies rose and mounted to the drawing-room, though not before his companion had whispered to him to make haste and join them, and not let "Erskine" sit for ever over that "horrid wine."

As soon as they found themselves alone, the three brothers drew their chairs closer together, and entered into a confidential conversation.

"Gordon! you don't appear to me, to be in very good spirits," said Mr. Preston Romilly, kindly.

His brother Preston had always been the one most friendly with the A.D.C., most lenient to his youthful follies, and most certain that the day would arrive when he should abandon them.

"Well! it's not a pleasant thing to come home, and find that your father has been buried a fortnight beforehand," replied the A.D.C., gravely, "and especially when the journey has been undertaken with the sole object of seeing him again."

"And the provision he has made for your future is not arranged entirely to your satisfaction," added Mr. Romilly, with a grim smile.

"Well, I *am* vexed, vexed and disappointed, I acknowledge it," replied the youngest brother, "and what is more, I consider I have every reason to be so."

"About the conditions on which you inherit your money?" said Preston, enquiringly.

"Yes! could any be more iniquitous or unjust? I am condemned, either to a life-long poverty, or to marry whether I will or no. Why was not Stanhope ordered to do the same? Why is he permitted to exercise his own judgment in the matter, and not myself? It's a cruel shame; and if my father were not in his grave, I should feel disposed to curse him. As it is, he has left me no pleasure in recalling his memory."

At this Preston Romilly stretched out his hand, and laid it gently, but firmly, on the A.D.C.'s shoulder.

"You had better not speak of him at present, Gordon," he said quietly, "you are not in a fit state to discuss his motives in this matter: when you have overcome your first disappointment, and grown more accustomed to the conditions of the will, I think you will acknowledge that after all, they are not so unfair as they may seem to you now."

Gordon Romilly pressed his brother's hand, and remained silent; for his heart was burning within him, and he could not

trust himself to speak. Mr. Romilly took advantage of the occasion.

"That is just what I said to you, Gordon, when we spoke together on the subject this afternoon. Stanhope never gave his father a moment's uneasiness with regard to his future: but you did, and he evidently considered that by binding you down to contract a respectable marriage, he was doing you the greatest kindness in his power. You are not limited to the choice of one woman, or six, or a dozen: you have the whole world to choose from, and you may take your time about it: for until it pleases you to make up your mind, you have your allowance and your pay to live upon, and I cannot say that I see the extreme hardship of the case."

"And nor will Gordon after a few days' quiet deliberation," interposed Preston Romilly. "Of course he will marry, it would have been desirable under any circumstances, and becomes doubly so, under the present ones."

"And pray how do you expect to see me

set about attaining this desirable end," enquired the A.D.C., scornfully. "Am I to run up and down the West End making known my wishes and the reason of them to the respectable community at large, or shall I advertise for a wife in the public papers, and hold out the thirty thousand as bait? You sit at your ease quietly discussing this prospect," he continued, his tone changing to one of indignation, "as though men were puppets, women articles of merchandise, and marriage a mere convenience, and as if it were worth my while to barter my happiness for life for a paltry sum of money."

At this burst of grandiloquence, so unlike Gordon Romilly's usually *nonchalant* manner of treating the subjects under discussion, his hearers looked at one another in surprise, exchanging glances of mutual significance.

"Oh!" said Mr. Romilly, at last, with a prolonged emphasis on the ejaculation, "if that is the way the wind blows, Gordon, I have nothing further to say about the

matter. Else had you asked my advice in a quiet, reasonable manner, I might have put you in the way of accomplishing your object without resorting to any of the violent means which you seem to consider necessary."

"Go on!" said the A.D.C., sulkily, "I am quite ready to listen to you!"

He believed that nothing his relatives said or left unsaid, could make any possible difference in his future actions: but he thought it best for the sake of keeping his secret, not to appear too bigoted in regard to adhering to his own opinion.

"I was going to suggest to you," continued Mr. Romilly, "that you need not go very far out of your way to find a wife, who shall, in all respects, fulfil the intentions of my father's legacy. A marriage with Lady Rose Sellon, towards whom you certainly did not seem unfavourably inclined, this time last year, would be as desirable a one, I suppose, as he even could have aspired to."

"Is that the reason for which you asked

her to meet me here ?" demanded Gordon, sarcastically.

Mr. Romilly looked at his brother Preston with a deprecating smile.

"Would you not think," he said, "to hear him talk, that I had some private interest in seeing him invested with his patrimony ? My dear Gordon, if you reflect a moment, what possible difference can it make to me, whether you marry or remain single ? Shall I be any the better, or worse off, in either case ? I speak for your own good, and with the sole view of helping you. The young lady, if I mistake not, (of course this is between ourselves) would prove an easy conquest, for your attentions to her were rather talked of after your visit to Compton Grange, and Maria tells me that her sister was very well disposed towards you. Added to this, she has ten thousand pounds of her own, which, with your own money, would make a very nice little fortune. Now what could you want more ?"

"Well, it won't be, and so there's an end

of it," returned Captain Romilly hotly, "and don't you think it's time we went upstairs and had some coffee? for I want to run round to the club and see if there's a letter from Drewitt or any of the other fellows in the Brigade, before I go to bed."

"It won't be just yet; but you'll think of it, Gordon," said his brother Preston as all three men rose to their feet, "a lovely girl! fashionable, well-educated, and not portionless; it would be just such a marriage as all your friends would rejoice to see you make, and which would, doubtless, be eventually a source of great happiness to yourself. You must learn not to be too fastidious in such matters, my dear fellow; we should none of us marry at all if we waited until we had found our ideal; and if you are lucky enough in these days to get a young, pretty, and virtuous wife, you will have outstripped most of your contemporaries in the race of life."

"I should prefer to be beaten," replied the A.D.C. in the same sullen tone he had

employed before; and then the others appeared to think they had wasted argument enough upon him, and they all went into the drawing-room, where they found Lady Rose Sellon half extended on the sofa, and apparently deeply engaged in the perusal of a new book. At sight of her, pretty as she was, Gordon Romilly turned away almost with disgust, and went and seated himself by his little niece at the other end of the apartment. But Lady Rose was not to be thus baffled. She was a time-hardened flirt, with manners so forward, that in another girl and in another century, they would have been termed bold; and she had no intention to let the handsome Captain Romilly slip so easily out of the meshes she had woven for him during the past season. So she tossed her volume to one side, and left the sofa and came and sat upon the other hand of Ellen Romilly.

"What do you think of our niece, Captain Romilly?" she enquired tenderly, (it was so delightfully suggestive to be able to

link their interests together thus). "Has she not grown immensely? I say if this goes on she must be brought out next season, or we shall have some gentleman running away with her beforehand."

"I hope it will be a long time before Ellen begins to think of such nonsense," replied Gordon Romilly, who had been listening with some interest to the girl's description of her school-room life, and of her little brothers and sisters in the nursery. "How old are you, Ellen?"

"Sixteen, Uncle Gordon, but I never dine downstairs when there is company, and mamma says I shall not come out for two years yet."

"And a very sensible decision of mamma's," replied Captain Romilly, as glancing beyond the innocent face beside him, he encountered the unmistakable look of admiration which Lady Rose had fixed upon himself; and turned away abruptly to enter into conversation with his sisters-in-law.

Coffee was served in a domestic manner

on the side-table, and as Lady Rose handed him a cup, and questioned with her large brown eyes in what she had offended him, the slight rancour which his brother's allusion had raised in his heart against her, melted away; and when a short time afterwards she took her seat at the piano and commenced to sing, he followed her and stood beside the instrument.

Lady Rose sang well. She had a good voice, and was the pupil of one of the best Italian masters in town; and Gordon Romilly was very susceptible, both to music and the charms of women.

As he listened to the thrilling notes which she poured forth for his benefit, and met the warm glances which she turned upon him, and watched the graceful movements of her delicate white fingers, he sunk into a deep reverie, which the influence of the music she was singing caused unconsciously to become sad. The song which Lady Rose had chosen was the "*Du bist mir nah' und doch so fern,*" of Reichardt, and the tender refrain—

"Du liebes aug, du lieber stern !
Du bist mir nah' und doch so fern,"

again and again repeated, sounded on his heart like the echo of a voice far away, calling on him to be true and faithful.

"Why, Captain Romilly, what are you dreaming of?" exclaimed Lady Rose Sellon as the third verse came to a conclusion, and he still maintained his attitude of thoughtful silence, "you look just like 'the knight of the rueful countenance.' I don't know whether I am to accept your abstraction as a compliment to my singing or otherwise; but at any rate you shall have a less melancholy strain this time," and tossing over a quantity of loose music which lay upon the piano, she selected "*Liebes Bitte,*" another song by the same composer, and sung it to its English words. But when she came to the refrain—

"Stay with me, my darling, stay
And like a dream thy life shall pass away,"

giving it with the full pathos and meaning

of which it was capable, accompanied by the most melting glances, Gordon Romilly could stand it no longer.

It seemed to him as though this woman must know everything: his love of luxury, the conditions of his father's will, his mockery of a marriage; and with her beauty, and her money, and her evident advances, was in league with his brother Erskine and the devil to lure him from Véronique.

With an abruptness, unpardonable in the eyes of Lady Rose, and unaccountable in those of his relations, he left the instrument before the song was brought to a conclusion, and with his former lame excuse of wishing to go to the club to see if there were letters waiting for him, walked out into the open air.

CHAPTER IV.

MONEY VERSUS HONEY.

NINE or ten days had elapsed since Gordon Romilly's return to England, but although more than one mail had left for India during that period, he had not written by them. Half-a-dozen times at least had he placed the paper before him, and sat down, pen in hand, resolved to execute his task, and as often, finding that words in which he could express his meaning refused to come at his desire, had he cast them both aside, soothing his uneasy conscience with the forced assurance, that until his mind became a little more decided, and he had finally settled on the best course for his pursuance, it was useless, as impossible, to write. He knew that he had promised

that Père Joseph should have the earliest news of his arrival, and the remembrance pricked him whenever it occurred; but at the same time, he had said that he would let him know what his intentions were regarding Véronique, and it was of no use keeping his bargain in one respect without fulfilling it in the other. He had no intentions regarding Véronique, or himself, or anybody; he was in a Slough of Despond, tied hand and foot in a quagmire of doubt and difficulty, and with no more idea how he should struggle out again, than how he should receive his legacy without fulfilling the conditions his father's will attached to it. He pondered on his future, night and day, and was miserable and uneasy. He hoped that Véronique might not be learned respecting the arrival and departure of the mails. Still he knew how quick the senses grow when taught by love, and made a resolution every twelve hours that the next should not go by without taking her a few lines, however incoherently expressed, to assure her of his well-doing and unaltered

affection. And still the letter was a thing to be accomplished.

One sultry afternoon, as he was sitting before his desk in his own room, thoughtfully regarding a sheet of paper on which he had scribbled a few words in his large irregular hand, a knock sounded on the panel of his door, and, hastily thrusting the unfinished letter between the leaves of his blotting-book, Gordon Romilly gave permission to enter, and in another moment his brother Preston was seated by his side. This gentleman, who, as has been said before, was Gordon's most affectionate brother, was also the most like him in personal appearance, being tall, and fair, and well-featured ; but, owing to his profession, he wore a clean-shorn face, which, by disclosing the formation of his mouth and chin, betrayed the weakness of his character more fully than in the case of the A.D.C. Notwithstanding which weakness Gordon Romilly had been used to look up to his brother Preston, no less on account of his sacred calling than of the difference

of ten years existing between their ages, and he had asked for and taken his advice oftener perhaps than he had done that of any other man.

Now, as he saw who was his visitor, he smiled, though rather seriously; and when Preston asked him why, on such a lovely day, he kept himself a prisoner to his room, responded with a sigh and the confession that he had been thinking, and did not feel inclined for company.

"Shall I go, then?" suggested Preston.

"By no means! I am glad to see you there; you will save me for an hour perhaps from my own thoughts."

"Are they such very bad companions, Gordon, then?"

"Deuced bad; in fact they couldn't be worse. The truth is, Preston, my father's will has put me in a hole, and I don't believe I shall get out of it again."

Preston Romilly wheeled his chair round so as to face his brother.

"My intention in seeking you this afternoon, Gordon, was to speak to you about

that very matter. We leave for Rolandstone to-morrow, as you know, for I only engaged my substitute for a month, and I may not have another opportunity of talking to you for some time to come."

"No talking can undo the injury!" said Gordon, curtly.

"It may greatly lessen your idea of its extent," replied his brother. "Come, Gordon! there is something behind all this, and you had better make a clean breast of it at once. Confide in me—let me know what it is that makes you so confident that you shall never marry, and I will do all in my power to help you out of the difficulty."

At these words the A.D.C. started violently, and coloured like a girl—signs which did not pass unnoticed by his companion, but he turned his eyes the other way, and left him to recover by himself. At first Captain Romilly was about to deny the charge, or at all events, to try and laugh it off; but the next moment the thought had struck him, whether he might

not tell his brother as much of his story as did not inculpate himself, and judge from his remarks what would be his decision did he hear the whole.

"Well, Preston, you are right!" he said after a pause: "there *is* a reason; but, remember, it must not go beyond ourselves. The fact is, whilst I was in India, I made an awful fool of myself, and I'm in a regular mess."

"I was sure of it," said Preston Romilly complacently, "there could be no other cause for your going on in the absurd manner that you have about your father's will. You've entangled yourself with some woman, I suppose, and made promises to her which it is impossible that you can now perform. Well, you must be bought off, if there is no other way of getting out of it. A disagreeable job, of course, and doubtless an expensive one, but anything is better than fulfilling an engagement which should never have been made."

"But—but—" stammered Gordon, "it's worse than that, Preston. It isn't an en-

gagement exactly—it—it—in fact it's a deuced sight worse than that;" and as he spoke he looked down upon the carpet between his knees, and tapped the floor with his foot nervously, whilst his listener, with a significant sound, compressed his lips, and slowly nodded his head.

"Ah! it's there, Master Gordon, is it?" he said after an awkward silence; "well, you continue to make difficulties for yourself as you pass through life, I must say. And what on earth could be your object—amusement, occupation, or sheer love of mischief?"

Gordon saw that his brother had misunderstood his meaning, but he dared not enlighten him further. And after all, had Mr. Preston Romilly put his insinuation into words, would he have miscalled his connection with Véronique?

"Not one of the three," he answered, with a sigh. "I was seriously attached to her——"

But at this his brother looked seriously alarmed.

"Why, that's the worst disclosure you've made yet, Gordon, though, knowing to what your 'serious attachments' have hitherto amounted, I am not yet convinced that the misfortune is irremediable. Now, look here, my dear fellow," drawing his chair closer to his brother's as he spoke, and laying his hand affectionately on his; "you know that I have your interests at heart, so I hope that you may trust implicitly that I should give you no advice but such as would be lawful to pursue. We'll suppose that the girl to whom you have alluded is virtuous and discreet——"

"Of course she is," interposed the A.D.C. with ready indignation.

Mr. Preston Romilly smiled.

"Yes, yes! of course; did I not say that we would take all that for granted? But at the same time she does not move in the same sphere of life as yourself."

"No—not exactly," murmured Gordon.

"Well, in such a case, and under other circumstances, I might say, marry her. If you were a hard-working, persevering man,

and marriage with such a person entailed upon you no great pecuniary loss, and would be likely to prove a safeguard for the rest of your existence against a similar temptation, I should say, perhaps, marry her, and make her an honest husband to your life's end. But I cannot believe, Gordon, that such a marriage would be for your ultimate good. You are a lazy, extravagant fellow—when I am giving you advice, you know, you must not mind my speaking plainly—who have been used to every luxury and every indulgence, and whom such a union as I allude to would at once plunge into a situation of comparative poverty. Would you be able to stand it? Do you love this woman, whoever she may be, sufficiently to contemplate such an existence with satisfaction for her sake? Would it not, on the contrary, become, in a short time, unbearable to you, and from sheer disappointment and disgust drive you into the very excesses from which, under other circumstances, it might have saved you?"

"But *her* feelings," said Gordon, with excitement, "do I owe nothing to them, to the hopes I have raised by my promises, and the promises I have made of my love?"

"Doubtless you do; and not to be able to redeem such promises is one of the punishments you have brought on yourself by your ill-doing. It is the same with this, Gordon, as with many of your past money transactions; you have plunged head-foremost into debt, without the least notion of how, when called upon to pay, you may be able to cover your liabilities. But that does not alter the barren fact. The poor girl is very much to be pitied, there is no doubt of that, but, at the same time, I should consider you were doing her a greater kindness now, by leaving her alone, to get over her disappointment as she may, than by searching her out again to share your penury with you—always, supposing, of course, that you make her a proper compensation."

"Ah! but you entirely mistake," in-

terrupted Gordon, quickly, "she won't get over it so easily as that! this is not a case for compensation or for money; she would not take it, Preston—you don't know—there is a reason—" and there he halted, looking foolish.

"Have you kept anything of importance back from me?" enquired his brother, almost authoritatively.

"No—that is to say, she is not so common as you seem to suppose, and—" commenced the other.

"You haven't *married* the woman, have you?" exclaimed Mr. Preston Romilly, bursting into sudden suspicion, "you have not been to church with her?"

This last expression was the saving of Gordon's secret, which at the first enquiry had been trembling on his tongue. He remembered that he had not been to church with her, that the ceremony in the Roman Catholic chapel was binding upon nothing but his sense of honour, and he stammered out a hesitating 'no.'

"Well, then," replied his brother, appa-

rently much relieved by the assurance, "I see no difficulty in the matter. She will fret at your desertion of her, doubtless, but she will soon get over it—girls always do; you mustn't judge of the strength of their affection by your own—and after a while she will marry a soldier, or some other fellow in her own grade of life, and be much happier than she could have been with you. Not a day passes but we see how far less fine and sensitive the feelings of people in that class are, than ours."

"You don't know her!" muttered Gordon, as he recalled the memory of Véronique, and mentally compared her delicacy with that of ladies with whom he was acquainted.

"Of course not; I only speak from what I hear you say; but I know *you*, Gordon, and feel convinced that if you desire any happiness in the future, you must try to conquer this attachment as something not worthy of your pursuance. Strive to lose sight of your private feelings in the matter—trample them down, push them to one

side, think only of your high birth and connections, and the wishes, breathed by your dying father for your welfare and respectability; and make up your mind to do the right thing, and fulfil the expectations which your family have formed for you. This folly must be rooted up altogether; did it result in marriage it would sink you like a stone—and if you even allow it to stand in the way of your making a more suitable connection, it will entail next door to poverty upon you. My dear brother! pray be advised by me—put it out of your head as soon as ever you can, and begin to look about you for the most creditable means by which you may enter upon your inheritance."

"Sooner said than done," said Gordon Romilly, huskily, as he rose from his seat, and leaned out of the bedroom window, "it seems a strange thing to me, Preston, that a man is not to be trusted to choose for himself in such matters, even at the age of five-and-twenty."

"Do you think so?" returned his bro-

ther, with a smile; "I, on the contrary, consider it a mercy that in this world we are not always left to our own impulses; marriage would much oftener turn out happily were it made more a matter of deliberation and less of passion than it is at present. It is very seldom, Gordon—" Mr. Preston Romilly had risen also by this time, and was apparently about to make a move, "that we find it possible, in such an union, to combine those two great desirabilities, love and our own advantage; and when it has to be a choice between the two, depend upon it, the last-named wears the longer."

"You never gave the other a trial," replied the A.D.C., sullenly.

"I did not, I confess it; I was wise enough to look out for the main chance, and have not yet repented my choice. What difference do you think it makes to a man, Gordon, three months after marriage, whether his wife is young or old, fat or thin, pretty or commonplace? He is tired of making love to her, under any circum-

stances, by that time, and begins to long for his old friends, his old amusements, and his old occupations, again! And if his friends have cut him, and he has no money wherewith to pursue either his amusements or his occupations, what then? Do you imagine that a pretty face or a few caressing words will make up to him for the loss of these? If you do, you must know less of the world and human nature than I gave you credit for."

A shrug of the shoulders from Gordon Romilly was all the answer that his brother got; and then the elder man moved towards the door.

"Well! I'm going now, my dear fellow, for I promised to drive in the park at four o'clock, with Maria and Lady Rose, but I do hope you will think seriously over what I have said. I know of no means by which you could sooner divert your mind, and cure yourself of any love-sick fancies you may be harbouring, than by the contraction of such a marriage as your father hoped to see you make. And with respect to the

one Erskine urged upon your notice the night of your return home, I don't see how you could possibly do better. By the way, do you feel inclined to take my place this afternoon in the barouche ?"

With an expression, at once unpremeditated, unfraternal, and unreligious, Gordon Romilly hurled a negative at his ecclesiastical brother's head, which sent him flying downstairs, lest the last part of their conference should have been overheard, and taken as criterion of the whole. And then the A.D.C. returned to his position by the open window, and leant from it, taking in the narrow view of bricked yards, chimney-pots, and leaden cisterns, as he gloomily reviewed the conversation he had just held with Preston, and attempted to persuade himself that the sweet idyll upon the Neilgherry Hills, of which Véronique had formed the central and the most attractive portion, was not fading fast upon the back-ground of his life, and receding further and further from him every day.

He gazed out on the stunted, blackened

trees, of London growth, and watched the dingy cats creeping along from one wall to the next, and tried to disbelieve that between him and her already was a great gulf fixed, across which neither might stretch loving arms to reach the other. He burned with shame when he thought he could resign her for a lump of gold, but he shuddered at the prospect of retaining her in mutual poverty ; he loved the flesh-pots and the leeks of Egypt, and he could not reconcile himself to the idea of losing everything that he most valued, for a woman's sake.

At one moment, as the eyes of Véronique seemed to peer wistfully into his own, and he heard her soft voice say, "*mon Gordon !*" he swore beneath his breath that no power on earth should ever make him give her up ; but at the next, a vision of the little bungalow upon the barren hills, of an existence isolated, monotonous, and save for love, devoid of all attraction, clashed with that of a luxurious home surrounded by the varied charms of town life and town

companions ; until he felt that though the one might be a brief elysium for him, the other was a real necessity.

But then, to put its light out, came a thought of the girl whom he had really learned to love, left to herself, and the entreaties of her suitors, of her hope in his affection, her trust in his fidelity, dying slowly day by day, until she came to look upon herself as lost, and in defence against despair, yielded to the solicitations of David or some other creature, waiting to take occasion of her first weak moment, and gave away the hand she had considered his.

This was a prospect which he could not contemplate, until he remembered that it must be one thing or the other ; that he must either hold Véronique against the world, or resign her to her own devices—either shelter her in his bosom on a hundred and fifty a year—or give her up entirely, and try to lose the thought of what she had been to him, in the embraces of another woman and the happi-

ness to be acquired for thirty thousand pounds.

Halting between two opinions thus, wavering first to one side and then the other, torn by conflicting thoughts, both threatening by turn to gain the mastery over him, Gordon Romilly lingered by the open window until the dusk had fallen, and the echo of children's voices in the square had ceased, and the return of the carriage from the park with the lively remarks of Lady Rose as she climbed the staircase leading to her dressing-room, recalled him to a sense of his position and told him that it must be time to dress for dinner.

Turning from the window with a sigh, although at the same moment he yawned and stretched himself to make believe that nothing was the matter, he caught sight of the half-scribbled paper in his blotting-book, and seizing hold of it with an energy apparently quite unworthy of the occasion, tore it vehemently into a dozen pieces and scat-

tered them far and wide into the open air.

Then as he watched them slowly part from him, borne gradually away by the breathless air of June; floating out of sight as though loath to disappear; a sudden thought that in like manner, he was casting from him something far more valuable than written words, or wealth, or luxury, or refinement, struck upon the very core of his pusillanimous heart, and with an oath at what he considered his weakness, Gordon Romilly threw himself across his desk, and with his hot face buried in his hands, shed tears.

He could neither hold her like a man nor resign her like a man. He was precisely in the same predicament that he had been when he first thought of marrying Véronique.

His conscience had reproached him then, but still he married her; his conscience reproached him now, and yet—he will desert her!

"Unstable as water," the curse which

was pronounced on Reuben, might have been as aptly said of him that (except in folly) he should "never excel."

CHAPTER V.

AT COMPTON GRANGE.

As soon as Captain Romilly had made up his mind—as much, that is to say, as so vacillating a mind is capable of being made up—that if he had any regard for his own advantage, he must try and resign all thoughts of Véronique Moore, he evinced an unaccountable restlessness to get out of town. After the first week of his arrival there he had been afraid to go near his club, from dread of having a letter from her which should shake his newly-formed determination, put into his hand ; and yet he was so anxious to know if she had written, and what she had said, that, two or three times a day, he would start from

home with the intention of enquiring, and returning to the house without having done so, out of temper with himself and the world, would display such evil humours that Lady Rose Sellon, (little as she cared for anything but his outward man,) would be almost ready to admit that the A.D.C., however handsome, was not worth the trouble she was taking to secure him. His propositions at this period were almost as changeable as his demeanour.

One morning he would announce that he was about to start for Scotland, to pay a visit to his mother's family; the next to Winchester, to see his brother officers, or to Shoeburyness to stay a month with Stanhope; and on the third, to the amazement of the breakfast-table, would declare his intention of writing out to India to resign his staff appointment, and applying for leave to return to his regimental duty. Mr. Romilly became more despairing of him every day. He was quite certain that Gordon was going to give respectability again the slip, and enter on his old career,

regardless of the feelings of anyone but himself. But Lady Maria gallantly threw herself into the breach.

"Your brother and Rose don't seem to be getting on very fast together," she said one evening in the confidence of the four-poster, "let me leave town before yourself this season, Erskine! There is nothing for us to do here, and the weather is abominably warm; I will take the children with your brother and Rose down to Compton Grange, where you can follow us as soon as your duties will permit; and depend upon it, if there is ever to be anything between them, it will come to a head in the country much sooner than here."

Mr. Romilly admitted the sense of his wife's suggestion, and on the following day put it before the unsettled mind of the A.D.C.

"Maria and Rose are tired of London, Gordon; and are going with the children to Compton Grange for a breath of fresh air. If it were not for my parliamentary duties I should, of course, accompany them,

but as it is, I am bound to remain here until the House is dissolved. Will you therefore have the kindness to take charge of them for me? You have been expressing a wish, I think, for change, and the Earl and Countess will be charmed to see you at the Grange."

The bait took. Gordon Romilly, relinquishing the idea of Scotland, Winchester, or Shoeburyness, prepared for croquet-parties, strawberry feasts, and such innocent amusements as were not inconsistent with their late bereavement, instead. He accompanied his sister-in-law and Lady Rose Sellon down to Compton Grange, looked after the luggage in the train, and sat in the same carriage with the children, as though he had been the father of a family himself, and woke up on the following morning bound by a voluntary promise to remain the guest of the Earl and Countess of Tor for at least a month.

Compton Grange was one of those charming old-fashioned country places which possess every facility for entertaining a

large number of people according to their various tastes, and owners who are never so happy as when they see their guests striving to amuse themselves. It had a croquet lawn, and a lake with pleasure-boats, and a good billiard table, and a stable full of horses. It boasted of a park, where ramblers might conceal themselves for ever, and a labyrinth, where they might wander and be lost, (or pretend to have been so), and various leafy arbours holding only two, and reared for love-making, with large umbrageous trees, which invited the beholder to stretch himself beneath their shade and rest.

And as, in addition to all this, the Earl of Tor, notwithstanding his numerous children, possessed a competency sufficient to lavish every luxury upon his friends, Compton Grange was a very pleasant house to stay at in the melting months of summer. The house was full of guests, and pic-nics, botanising excursions, and riding parties to the various places of note in the neighbourhood were being organised every day ; but

though Lady Maria Romilly generally contrived on such occasions that her sister Rose and her brother-in-law should be thrown together, their courtship did not appear to make much progress; for if, led away at one moment by the attraction of her thrilling glances and the infection of her deep-drawn sighs, the A.D.C. responded to his fair companion's real, or studied interest in him, at the next, some chance allusion or some fleeting thought, by recalling his memory of Véronique, would make him quickly withdraw the eyes which he had fixed, or drop the hand which he had taken, until Lady Rose began almost to despair of ever claiming his attention for more than five minutes at a time. But one afternoon when, under the pretence of searching for some specimens of botany, she had persuaded him to join her in a ramble in the park, she almost thought the hour had come for him to make his wishes known.

It had been a sultry day, with little sun, the atmosphere was soft and languid, and

not a breath of air stirred the heavy foliage of the trees. Lady Rose, flushed with the heat, excited by the occasion, and robed in a light diaphanous dress, over which her brown hair fell in tangled curls, looked so handsome, and made such desperate love to Gordon Romilly, that had it not been for the simple accident of a word, it is probable her expectations would have been fulfilled. But as she was leaning on his arm, and looking up into his face with her full brown eyes, she saw his blue ones catch a portion of their fire, and commence to sparkle in return, and Lady Rose was too accomplished a strategist not to know that the juncture had arrived when the exhibition of a little bashfulness would stand her in good stead. And so she withdrew her gaze with an affectation of timidity, and with another affectation of confusion, stopped short, professing to look for something in the hedge.

"Don't turn away from me," exclaimed the A.D.C., made bold by her advances to him. "What is it that you want, Rose, let me pick it for you," and he thrust his

head beside hers, so as to look again into her countenance.

"I thought I saw—I mean I wanted—" she commenced, averting her face as though to hide her blushes, and then burying it in her hands. "Oh! Captain Romilly, pray don't look at me like that, you really make me so nervous that I don't know what I mean," and Lady Rose laughingly shook her curls over her eyes, and thought to herself that it was surely coming now.

"Do you know what *I* mean?" said Gordon Romilly, led away by the excitement of the moment, "do you know, Rose, that—"

"Oh! *don't!*" she cried, with mock alarm, as she professed to stop her ears, "pray, pray don't, Captain Romilly! I cannot listen to you, I do not wish to hear it; I only wanted a tiny flower from the hedge;" and confident that her device would hasten rather than retard the A.D.C.'s proposal, Lady Rose Sellon darted on a bunch of common speedwell, and held it up before

him. She had better far have left him to conclude his sentence.

"Look here!" she said, speaking rapidly, as if to cover her maidenly confusion, "this is the blue speedwell, is it not, the same flower which they call abroad the 'véronique?' Maria says it is the shepherd's purse, and will insist that 'véronique' is quite another species; but this is it, is it not, Captain Romilly? You ought to know, who have travelled so much about the world."

He had been so close to her when she commenced this sentence, that their shoulders touched; he had been so nearly stepping on the limed twig set for him, that he had even contemplated an assault upon her upturned mouth; but as the foreign term for "speedwell" left her lips, he changed colour, turned away from her abruptly, and took a few steps forward. This action cast cold water on the eloquence of Lady Rose. Fearful lest she should have over-acted her part, for a moment she stood where he had left her, in silent expectation; but seeing

that the A.D.C. strode on, without betraying any consciousness that she was not beside him, she exclaimed, indignantly:

"Captain Romilly!"

Her voice recalled him to himself. He stopped, looked back, and returned to the spot where he had left her.

"I beg your pardon," he said, stammering. "I really beg your pardon, Lady Rose! This is one of my abominable fits of absence, and I forgot for the moment you were not walking with me. I think you were asking me about this flower, but I am no botanist. I have often seen it in the hedgerows, but until you mentioned it, I did not even know its English name. Do you think it pretty? it appears very common and insignificant to me."

But Lady Rose was not to be appeased in a moment.

"No! I don't think it pretty!" she said, throwing the unoffending "speedwell" over the hedge, "and I feel dreadfully tired, Captain Romilly, and I intend to go home. No!" seeing him turn as though

to accompany her, "I don't wish you to go with me, thank you: I am tired of talking as well as walking, and would rather be alone."

"Are you in earnest?" he said, though without appearing to resent her decision, "else I shall be happy, of course, to escort you!"

"Yes, of course," echoed Lady Rose, "but I should not be happy to have you, so you can save yourself the trouble," and in another minute, her white dress had fluttered away from his side, and was lost amongst the trees.

He did not attempt to follow her, he only waited until she was out of sight, before he picked up the bunch of wild field blossoms which she had cast away from her, and looked into their innocent, blue eyes, recalling others, almost as blue and innocent, and put them in his breast with a deep sigh. This incident, slight as it appears, affected Gordon Romilly more than anything which had occurred since he had come to Compton Grange; it had seemed such

sacrilege to hear the name of Véronique from the lips of the woman, for whom, a prophetic instinct whispered to him he should be false to her: such an insult to see her fling the namesake flowers so scornfully across the hedge, although she could not know the significance they bore for him. He wandered up and down the park, thinking of the proposal into which the charms of Lady Rose had so nearly betrayed him, until the gong sounded to recall all wanderers to dinner. And as he obeyed the summons, he resolved that he would take the first opportunity of telling his host that business of importance carried him in another direction, and seek a refuge from the attacks of his fair enslaver, in the hospitality of his brother Stanhope. When he descended to the drawing-room it was full of guests, but he looked in vain for Lady Rose. Generally she had been ready enough to embrace any occasion of talking with him, and the spare time before dinner he had considered especially his own: but on this day, she did not appear till quite

the last, and then, although she was evidently armed for conquest, being dressed with the greatest care, and apparently in the best of spirits, she directed all her attention to others. More than once did Gordon Romilly, conscious that by his conduct in the park, he had offended her, strive to catch her eyes, and assure himself he was forgiven : but Lady Rose Sellon's brown orbs were always turned in the opposite direction, and generally beaming upon some other man, and the A.D.C., although he had just resolved that he would leave the Grange in order to avoid her attentions, chafed under the idea that she had voluntarily withdrawn them, and sulked by himself on an ottoman, in one of the bay windows in consequence.

"Halloa, Romilly!" exclaimed the host, as the party sat down to dinner, and he caught sight of the A.D.C., "why, where have you been hiding yourself? I looked round the room half a dozen times for you, up stairs, but could see you nowhere. I wanted to introduce you to a great friend

of mine, Major Taylor," here the Earl intimated with his hand, a small, spare gentleman on his right, and the small, spare gentleman bowed. "He's just home from India, and though he tells me he never met you there, I daresay that you'll find some topic of mutual interest to talk about."

Here, Gordon Romilly, who had been watching some bye-play between Lady Rose Sellon and a handsome young lordling cousin, whom she permitted to take, what he considered, very unpardonable liberties with her, directed his observation to Major Taylor, and thought he looked very unlike a promising subject with whom to discuss topics of mutual interest, though in obedience to his host's request, he did his best to start a conversation with him.

But here the A.D.C. signally failed to make himself agreeable. What between the divided attention caused by Lady Rose's flirtation, and the abuse which he commenced by levelling at the Major's adopted country, the talk soon degenerated into a discussion which threatened to dis-

turb the tranquillity of the Earl's dinner-table, and to interfere with the appetite of at least one of the belligerents.

Major Taylor was a man who could not talk over a subject which annoyed him, quietly, and the dislike evinced by most Englishmen to Her Majesty's possessions in the east, was his greatest sore. The country which fed them, the country which clothed them, the country which paid them, he could not find enough to say against those miscreants who eat of her bread and her salt, and yet said she was the most detestable country in the world. The Major fumed and spluttered over his favourite topic and forgot to eat and to drink in his anxiety to prove that India was quite as desirable a residence as England, and for some reasons, more so ; whilst his cool, *nonchalant* looking antagonist leant back in his chair, occasionally drawing out an "ah!" or an "oh!" or "I'm glad you think so!" but not permitting the discussion to interfere in the slightest degree with the process of his digestion, until

indeed, Lady Rose took the side of the opposite party, and leaving the lordling cousin to take care of himself, directed the battery of her glances upon the little Major, agreeing emphatically with every point which he advanced, and crying "bravo" when Romilly was worsted in the argument. Then the A.D.C. might have been seen to fill up his glass rather more frequently than he had done before: and had the Major allowed him to do so, he would have been glad at this juncture, to retire from the conversation.

But Lady Rose Sellon would not permit of such a thing. She saw that the turn matters were taking annoyed Captain Romilly, and she urged the fiery Anglo-Indian by every means in her power, to persevere until his adversary should be defeated.

At sight of her party spirit and the smiles with which she strove to inspire his opponent, the A.D.C. waxed warm, and throwing off his armour of reserve, abused the East, its habits, manners, and customs, so roundly, that the Major grew perfectly

furious, and for the comfort of the whole dinner-table, the Earl thought himself bound to interfere, and beg his guests to change the subject. He thought it very unlikely, he said, that two gentlemen who had seen the country of India under such different aspects, the one having spent almost all his life there, and the other only a few months, should view it with the same eyes : but he did not see himself why each should not hold his own opinion on that topic, and still remain the best of friends and acquaintances. Upon which, Major Taylor, and Captain Romilly, bowed to each other ; and the former, still simmering with indignation, sought relief by recounting the delights of Indian life into the sympathising ears of Lady Rose ; whilst the A.D.C. re-applied himself to his comforter, the decanter, and drank a great deal more than was good for him. Annoyed by the incident of the afternoon, vexed by that which had just occurred, and jealous at the partiality affected by Lady Rose for her handsome cousin, and the little Indian

Major, Gordon Romilly sat silent and sulkily, during the rest of dinner, and when it was finally concluded and the gentlemen rose from their wine, to join the ladies in the drawing-room, he stumbled up from his seat, none the clearer for the liquor he had imbibed, and walked out upon the cool, fresh lawn, the blades of which were heavy with the dew of night. The moon was shining brilliantly, and every leaf and flower beneath her light was as apparent as by day.

Gordon Romilly seemed to breath freer, as he stood beneath her rays; he ran his fingers through his heated hair, and was not certain why he should feel miserable, or whether he felt miserable at all; but all his thoughts (such as they were,) dwelt on Rose Sellon and the trick which she had played him; and the idyll of the Neilgherry Hills had, for the moment, melted quite away. He stood for a few minutes thus, stupidly regarding the moon, and the sheet of light she threw across the lawn, and thinking, it can scarce be said on any-

thing particular, until his attention was attracted by the gleaming of a white dress which flitted past the sheet of moonlight, and disappeared beneath the drooping branches of a large acacia tree.

He knew whose dress it was ; if he had not dulled his faculties by wine, he might have guessed why it was there ; but he blundered after it, desirous of nothing but an explanation, and came on Lady Rose—Lady Rose pensive and alone, with tears upon her cheek !

CHAPTER VI.

AN AWAKENING.

VÉRONIQUE, opening her eyes from the swoon in which her husband had left her, saw Père Joseph sitting by her bedside, and watching her recovery with a look of deep solicitude. She guessed at once that Romilly was gone.

"*Il est parti,*" she said, as she lay back upon her pillow with a heavy sigh.

"Yes! my child, he is gone," replied Père Joseph, in their familiar language, "but it is to bring thee wealth, and a position far above thine expectations. Think of that, Véronique, and be comforted."

"I wanted but himself," she answered wearily.

"True, because thou art a woman; but had thy husband nothing but thyself, he would soon weary of thee. Men want something else beside their wives, Véronique, they crave for money, and a station in the world, and a name to leave their children. The brave good Romilly loves thee, he will return before long to claim thee for his wife; and till then, if thou wouldst guard his secret, thou must be brave also, and not let strangers see that thou art suffering."

"They shall not," said the girl resolutely, as she rose from her recumbent position, and tottered to a chair. "Gor-don shall have a wife as courageous as himself. But tell me, *mon père*," upturning a white face, full of piteous entreaty, "how long shall I have to endure this? For how many months must I watch before I see his eyes look in mine again, or hear his voice call 'Véronique?' Let me know the worst at once, that I may say to each hour as it goes, 'there are but so many more before I live again.'" Her uncle could not bear to

meet the pleading eyes she fixed upon him, knowing himself powerless to give her comfort, and whilst he answered her, he turned away his own.

"That is impossible for me to tell thee, Véronique; the good Gor-don may be two or three, or even four months absent; who can decide when a dying man is in the case? but depend upon it, as soon as ever he is able, he will return to thy side, and expect to find thee cheerful and in health."

"How could I be otherwise than cheerful when we meet again?" she answered quickly, "but I shall hear from him, *mon père!* How soon is it possible I can receive a letter?"

"In a couple of months," replied the priest more briskly. "It will take thy Gordon one month to reach his native land, and he promises to write as soon as ever he arrives there."

"Two months? two, long, weary months before I can even hear from him!" exclaimed the girl despondently, "*oh! mon Dieu! c'est plus que je n'en pourrai sup-*

porter." And overwhelmed with grief at the prospect, she burst into a flood of tears. But her uncle soothed and consoled her, and held up the bright side of the picture with such skill to her imagination, that he almost made her believe that two months was a period so brief that it would be over, before she had realised it had begun, and quieted by his assurances, Véronique washed the traces of sorrow from her countenance, and went downstairs as usual to prepare his supper. But when the time arrived for her to retire to the couch which Romilly had forsaken, the flood-gates of her grief were again unlocked. She watered the pillow where his head had lain but the previous night, with her tears, and finally fell asleep, with swollen eyelids and stained cheeks, like a child exhausted with sobbing, clasping the sacred pillow to her breast.

The next morning brought the Pegu pony, and with it, the note written by Gordon Romilly from the Ootacamund Hotel, and Véronique became almost as excited with delight, as she had been the day before

with sorrow. She kissed the note, she kissed the pony, she could almost have kissed the horsekeeper who brought them to her. The dear, dear note which he had written with his own hand so short a time before, which commenced, "My darling Véronique," and ended with, "Your own Gordon;" she embraced it, she wept over it, she hid it away in her bosom as the most sacred treasure she possessed. And then the pony, the brave Pegu which had brought her lover to her, which had carried him so often on his stout little back, did he know that her Gor-don was gone from both of them, and that no hand but hers should feed him till his master came again?

This proof of remembrance from him whom she regarded as her husband, this last assurance that he loved and thought of her, this entreaty that for his sake she would be brave and patient, seemed to call forth all the heroism lying dormant in the simple breast of Véronique. The same virtue which had enabled her to retain her

presence of mind when the missionary's child was killed, and when the "cheetah" disputed the right of way with Gordon and herself, came to her assistance now, and from that day, if she gave way to fruitless tears, it was in the privacy of her own chamber, for she never shed them before Père Joseph; and, excepting that she did not quite regain her old light-hearted mirthfulness, little difference was to be observed in her demeanour.

It had been Captain Romilly's wish that after his departure she should resign the household duties which hitherto had fallen to her share; and his wish was law to her, though she regretted he had thought it necessary.

"It would have been something to divert my mind, *mon père*," she said when alluding to it, "but if Gor-don thinks that it will spoil my hands, of course it must not be. Yet, I hope he will not vex himself if I continue to prepare your suppers. You would not relish them if cooked by any stranger, would you? and for me it is a

pleasure to think of, and to dress them to your taste."

And so Véronique retained that portion of the daily work ; and excepting, as the priest observed, that she devoted one hour every morning to praying in the little chapel for the safety of her absent husband, her time passed much the same as it had done before her marriage.

But when David returned from his visit to Coimbatore, Père Joseph and his niece had a harder part to play. It had been an especial stipulation of the A.D.C., that the young native should not be admitted into the family confidence, and although the priest had more than once attempted to shake his resolution, Captain Romilly had enforced it to the last. He disliked David exceedingly, for reasons already mentioned ; he distrusted as well as disliked him, and believed on account of his race that he must needs be crafty, treacherous, and revengeful. But he had altogether mistaken his character. The native was a man ; he was very fond of Véronique, and the attentions of

the Englishman to her had naturally called forth his worst feelings; yet, once convinced that she preferred the stranger to himself, he would have been the first to promise never to annoy her more. But now, ignorant of all that had taken place since his departure, he returned from Coimbatore, not hopefully, but certainly not despairingly, although the priest seized an early opportunity to assure his adopted son that he must never mention the subject of marriage to Véronique again.

"Is she so very averse to me, then, *mon père?*" demanded the young man mournfully.

"She loves thee as a brother, David, but she will never look on thee in any other light," replied Père Joseph. "Be assured that what I say is true; put all thoughts of such a thing out of thy head, for it will only bring thee to misery and perhaps to crime."

"Never to crime, *mon père!*" said David gravely; "be not afraid of that! But surely thou wouldest not grudge me hope,

—hope, which is not denied to the greatest wretch who breathes."

"But there is no hope for thee, *mon fils!*" replied the priest sadly, for he dearly loved his native child.

"Whilst there is life, there is hope," responded the young man more cheerfully; "and remember, *mon père*, that thou speakest of a woman. I will not worry her. I will not say one word more to Véronique upon the subject of my love; but I will wait, and I will love her, though in secret, and some day *le bon Dieu* may send me what my heart is thirsting for."

"No, no! my son," exclaimed the priest earnestly; "thou must not even love her, in that way; for believe me when I say that Véronique is not for thee. She never will be thine; it is impossible; I would not give her to thee, there! take that as my final answer," and Père Joseph, with a view to ending the colloquy, which was becoming painful to him, waved his hand hastily and was silent.

As he heard the words all the blood in

David's body seemed to rush into his dark handsome face, and he rose from the seat, as though to leave the room.

"I understand thee, *mon père*," he said, in a broken voice, "it is this blood," extending his bare arm, "this cursed black blood, which may not mingle with the stream of hers; and it must be cursed indeed since thou canst think it so——"

"No, no! David, my son! it is not that," interposed the priest; but the native's passions were aroused, and he would not stop to listen.

"Did I ask thee to save me from the fangs of the jackal or the pariah-dog?" he asked indignantly; "thou hadst better far have left me as a babe to their tender mercies, than have reared me to be a man, with all the desires and feelings of a man, but without a chance of obtaining the blessings which are showered so lavishly upon his fellow-creatures," and saying thus, David rushed from the apartment, and did not appear again for several hours, leaving the priest in great trouble and distress of mind,

though quite ignorant of what means should be employed to cure the native of his unfortunate attachment.

But when David had been a few days at home, he could not fail to observe the many articles of luxury which had been added to the bungalow since his departure, and hearing who had given them, again excited his suspicions with regard to the A.D.C.

"I see a pony in the stables," he said to Véronique on one occasion, "and handsome furniture about the rooms, and a jewelled ring upon thy hand," for Véronique wore her wedding ring against her heart, and the sapphire hoop upon her marriage finger, "and when I ask where they all came from, I am told from Captain Romilly. Is it usual, Véronique, for English gentlemen to scatter presents on all sides of them like this? Tell me, pray, for I know nothing of such things, remember; I am but a native."

Véronique, hurt at his sarcastic manner, and blushing under his enquiries, reminded

him that Captain Romilly had been nursed beneath their roof when sick, and that it was not surprising he should wish to show Père Joseph he was mindful of his kindness. But the native was still unconvinced of the necessity of such lavish generosity.

"He must have thought *mon père* needed a great many reminders of his gratitude," he answered scornfully; "and why did he place that ring upon thy finger, Véronique? is that also to shew Père Joseph that his hospitality is not forgotten?"

"How know you that he placed it there?" said Véronique, resenting the close catechism to which she was being subjected. "It is enough for you, *mon frère*, that Père Joseph knew that Monsieur Gor-don offered me the gift, and approved of my accepting it," and she moved from David's side with the air of a little queen, leaving him in a twofold state of misery from the information she had given him, and the way in which she had afforded it.

But as the period drew near when Véronique expected to receive her first letter

from England, a great change came over her demeanour. She lost the serene aspect which, with few exceptions, she had invariably maintained since the departure of her husband, and displayed instead a constant restlessness, which never permitted her to keep to one occupation for more than a few minutes at a time. Since she had more leisure on her hands—(Père Joseph had accounted to David for the appearance of the native servant by saying that he thought his niece had formerly been a little overtasked)—she had tried to further her education (that she might not disgrace her Gordon when he came to claim her) by reading such books as the bungalow possessed, and learning German with her uncle, a smattering of which she had already acquired from him.

But now, she was too anxious and uneasy to fix her thoughts on anything, and being compelled to avoid an open expression of her feelings, rendered them doubly harassing to bear. She rode into the Cantonment almost every day to enquire

whether the mail had yet arrived, and was sometimes driven to her wits' end to account to David for the abstracted gaze and look of watchfulness, of which he was constantly accusing her.

At last the mail came in, and when Véronique was convinced that it had brought no letter for her, the violence of her grief was terrible. Not that she doubted for a moment that Gordon Romilly had written to her, or that he would have done so if he could, but she thought first that he must have been drowned upon the passage home—swallowed up by the devouring element whose fury haunted her dreams—and when Père Joseph procured a newspaper, and showed her the name of Captain Romilly in print, as having reached Marseilles in safety, she was then convinced that he was sick, that he had fallen ill through grief at separating from her, or that his letter, his precious longed-for letter, had miscarried, or been stolen on the way.

Nothing but her uncle's oft-repeated

warning, that by giving way to every disappointment she incurred, she would bring suspicion on herself, and betray her cherished husband's secret, had the power to make the poor girl conquer her distress; but after a few days of unmitigated gloom, hope and trust gained the ascendency of her interrupted cheerfulness, and she was looking forward with the buoyancy of youth to the arrival of the next mail, which Père Joseph (who merely thought that Gordon Romilly had been too hurried to write immediately) assured her would be certain to bring the desired news.

At that period the mails between India and England only plied once a fortnight, and for two weeks Véronique lived upon expectation, only to be again disappointed. This time the priest was also seriously annoyed, although he attributed the default of the A.D.C. entirely to carelessness. He was a young, thoughtless man, and doubtless had met with many distractions on his first arrival at home; yet he might have remembered what a loving little heart

he had left behind him, and how anxiously she would be looking out for news of his well-doing.

But to Véronique Père Joseph said, that it must be by reason of his father's illness, which, if at its height, would leave him probably no time for writing letters.

"What! not to me?" she pleaded, "not one line, *mon père?* Ah! thou dost not know my Gor-don, or thou wouldst not think so. No, he is ill! I am sure that he is ill, and longing for me, and I have not the means of going to my husband."

Her uncle, as before, said all he could to comfort her, but, from that date, Véronique fell a victim to the fever of suspense. She never complained of feeling ill or miserable, and she said little to Père Joseph, even when he encouraged her to talk about her trouble to him, but she lost her appetite and spirits, her flesh began to waste away, and dark circles, (those sure signs of inward care), appeared about her eyes. She spent half her time writing long letters to her husband—letters which when com-

pleted, she would think she could write better, and tear up, to begin anew—letters which, even when despatched, never reached the unworthy hands of the man for whom they were intended.

The third mail now arrived, but still brought not a word from Captain Romilly; more than three months had elapsed from the date of his departure from the hills, and Père Joseph, to his annoyance added anger, and a little alarm; but Véronique said not a syllable. This third disappointment, although it must have weighed on her as heavily as the first and second, had not the same power to arouse the tempest of her grief, but it seemed to chill her very life-blood with despair, and put the seal upon her misery; yet she would hear nothing in the A.D.C.'s disfavour.

He was not careless, nor idle, nor thoughtless; he had not permitted friends, nor amusements, nor business, to come between them; if Père Joseph could say so, if he could but for a moment seriously think so, he had not the slightest idea of

the warmth, and the depth, and the truth, of her Gor-don's love for her. But he was ill; he had fallen perhaps dangerously ill, and it was her misery to be absent from him, and unacknowledged. And then the poor child, with tearless eyes, but hollow, careworn cheeks, would creep away from the priest's side, into the little chapel, and throwing herself prostrate on the paved floor, wrestle in prayer for the preservation of her husband's life.

When the fourth mail came in, it found Père Joseph pacing up and down before the post-office at Ootacamund, feverishly anxious for the opening of the bags. They were examined, but still there was no letter. The old man grew nearly frantic; a horrible suspicion that the Englishman had not really loved his child, seized upon his mind, and he thirsted to ascertain whether any one else in the cantonment had heard from him since his departure—whether either of his friends had had a letter, or received any news of his doings or whereabouts.

He pondered for a long time on the best

means of succeeding in this object, but although he knew that there were gentlemen staying at the hotel, who had been acquainted with Captain Romilly, it was difficult to find a valid excuse for putting such a question to them. At last he thought of one, and, whilst blushing for the subterfuge to which he was obliged to resort, trusted, that for the cause, it might be forgiven him, and, going up to the hotel, asked to speak with Mr. Daniels; who, happening to be within, walked out to meet him at the door, and politely enquired what he could do for him.

"I think I have seen you before," he added, "you are the Roman Catholic *padre*, aren't you? at least I believe that Captain Romilly told me so."

"He told you right, sir," replied Père Joseph, "that is the name by which I am known upon the Hills; and it is respecting Captain Romilly that I have ventured to trespass upon your attention—you know that he has gone home, sir. Can you give me his address in England?"

"What! does he owe you any money?" demanded Daniels, who could imagine no other reason for such a request coming from such a quarter.

"Do I look as though I could lend gentlemen money, sir?" replied Père Joseph, with a smile. "No, it is not that, but Captain Romilly visited me, at my bungalow, shortly before his departure, and he left a piece of property behind him, concerning which I should like to write to him."

"What was it that he left?" said Mr. Daniels, curtly.

"Nothing of much consequence, sir; only a crucifix."

"A *crucifix!* why, what the devil should Romilly want with a crucifix?"

"He is a Catholic," replied the priest, quickly.

"Captain Romilly a Catholic!" exclaimed Mr. Daniels; "you can't mean the same man that I do then!"

"I mean the gentleman who was *aide-de-camp* to the Governor of Madras, sir."

"Well, he's no more a Catholic (if you mean a Roman Catholic) than I am."

"But I assure you, you must be mistaken," urged the priest. "Captain Romilly has done me the honour to stay in my house, sir, so I ought to know."

"Well, it's the first I ever heard of it," replied the young man, laughing, "though it is not of much consequence. Colonel!" he exclaimed, as an elderly gentleman crossed the hall, "here's Romilly been stuffing up the priest that he's a Roman Catholic! Now, is it the case? You are acquainted with his whole family, and ought to know."

"What! Gordon Romilly, who was here the other day?" said Colonel Greene, advancing to the door-step, "of course he is not. His father was of the Bournemouth family, and they've all been staunch Protestants from the very first. He must have said so for a joke, my friend!" he added, turning to Père Joseph, who was almost speechless at this information.

"But—but—" he gasped, "might not the gentleman in question have entered the Romish Church at any time, sir? He is of age, he may have chosen to judge for himself."

"I don't know what his intentions may be for the future," returned the Colonel, smiling, "but I am quite sure that Captain Romilly is not a member of your church at the present moment. But what has this to do with your business here? Is it anything in which I can assist you?"

"It was his crucifix—his crucifix!" said Père Joseph, hardly knowing what he said, in the agony of the discovery he had just made; "but it matters little, sir, it matters little."

"But you want the address of Captain Romilly, do you not?" enquired Daniels, who was touched by the appearance of the old priest's disappointment. "I have not got it, I do not correspond with him; but perhaps the Colonel does—is it so, Colonel?"

"I do not, but I could procure it if I tried."

"It matters little, gentlemen, it matters little," repeated Père Joseph, in the same broken voice, and bowing to them, he moved slowly away, and left the hotel garden.

"How dreadfully cut up the poor old gentleman appears," said Mr. Daniels, as he returned with Colonel Greene into the house. "If Romilly has been playing any of his tricks upon him, I think it is a shame."

"More likely he is vexed at the thought of losing a disciple," replied the Colonel. "These Roman Catholics are red-hot after converts, and would not even despair of such a hopeless case as Romilly."

"They *must* be enthusiastic!" was Mr. Daniels' observation. Meanwhile Père Joseph was dragging his weary steps home to his bungalow. The news which he had received of Romilly's faith, had crushed him like a stone, for at one glance he had taken in the height and depth, the length

and breadth of the calamity which threatened to overwhelm him. Yet he would not tell what he had heard to Véronique, he could not bear to quench out the light in her young life at one fell stroke; he must wait, he must be patient, all sense of honour and justice could not be dead in Captain Romilly's breast, he might have wronged his darling, but he would surely see her righted before long. He almost crawled the distance which lay between the cantonment and his home, and when he reached it, and found himself alone with Véronique, he sunk down exhausted in a chair, unable even to address her. She, knowing for what reason he had left the bungalow, and seeing the condition in which he returned to it, thought that the worst had happened.

"Say it quickly!" she panted, as she dragged herself to his feet, and lifted eyes of agony to meet his own. "Put me out of pain, *mon père*, tell me where he died and how, and I will try to bear it."

This passionate appeal recalled Père Joseph to his senses.

"He is not dead, my child!" he said, affectionately, reproaching himself for giving her an extra pang, "for aught I know to the contrary, he is well and happy; but I have heard nothing, Véronique, there is no letter. God pity you, my lamb!"

She gave a quick gasping sigh as he pronounced the blessing on her, but his information, after all that she had dreaded, came as a relief.

"It is disheartening, but we must be patient," she whispered, wearily. "As long as I believe he lives, *mon père*, I shall never lose my patience nor my hope. The sea may divide us, accidents or illness or enemies come between us, but it cannot be for ever. *Gor-don loves me!*" she continued, clasping her hands and glancing upwards with a look, almost of ecstacy, upon her pale, thin face; "my husband loves me, and will return to me, although it may be later than we wished for, or we

hoped." And as Père Joseph gazed upon her truthful countenance, he felt he would have given worlds, had they been his, to share the feelings with which it was irradiated.

CHAPTER VII.

PÈRE JOSEPH TAKES A JOURNEY.

But before Véronique had had the opportunity to overcome many more such disappointments, another source of deep anxiety presented itself before her. Père Joseph was no bigot, he would have welcomed Gordon Romilly as a Protestant as heartily as he had done when he thought that he professed the same faith as himself; but from the hour that he heard he had been deceived in him, and consequently, that the marriage he had contracted with his niece according to the rites of the Roman Catholic Church, must be invalid, his health became much enfeebled, and his strength gave way. He was not a young man; for

thirty years he had been exposed to the trying temperature of an Indian climate, and though twenty of those years had been spent upon the hills, the variable atmosphere of the Neilgherries does not suit every constitution, and when the mind of the priest began to suffer, his body fell an easy prey to one of those many diseases which are engendered in that country by the heat, and brought to perfection by the rainy season.

The mental malady under which he was labouring he carefully concealed, and it was only from the fact of his ceasing to speak of Gordon Romilly's return with any hopefulness, that Véronique guessed that he mistrusted him, and thought him harsh towards her absent love in consequence; but the bodily complaint was not so easy to be hidden from the watchful eyes by which he was surrounded.

"Véronique! I begin to be alarmed about *mon père*," said David, one morning, after having watched the shrunken figure of the priest depart upon the daily round

of visits which he still insisted upon making. "His health does not improve, and it seems to me that he grows feebler every day."

"Oh! surely, David, you do not think his illness serious?" exclaimed the girl, as she lifted her pale face from the work on which she was employed, and turned on him a look of horror. "You do not think that he is really ill, that there is any chance he will not soon be well again?"

"I may be mistaken, Véronique," replied the young man, "but I *do* think so!" and as he concluded the sentence, he leaned thoughtfully upon the hoe he carried in his hand. Véronique burst into tears. In all her troubles she had never dreamt of this, that Père Joseph should go away and leave her to bear them by herself.

"What is it that ails you both?" asked David, earnestly, as he regarded her wasted form, and sunken tear-stained features. "What secret is there, Véronique, between Père Joseph and thyself, that should blanch thy face, and rob thee of thy spirits, and

bring him to the level of the grave? I am curious to be told."

"Secret!" repeated the girl colouring furiously beneath the accusation, "what secret should there be in lives like ours, David? We do the same things, week after week, year after year, until the day comes to lie down and die; and if, as you think, it is so close at hand for Père Joseph, the sooner that it comes to all of us the better," and Véronique rocked backwards and forwards, moaning at the prospect before her.

"Véronique, dear Véronique! I wish I could console thee!" exclaimed David as he cast his hoe down on the ground, and came round to her side and clasped his dusky hands above her own.

"Thou dost console me, *mon frère*," she answered gently, "the thought of thine affection is my best consoler; for when he is gone, what else shall I have to look to?"

Each day with Véronique the conviction was growing stronger either that Gordon

Romilly was dead, or that he had been led to believe that she herself was so. She was so simple and so ignorant of the fashion in which the business of this great world is carried on—and Père Joseph had entered so little on the subject with her, lately—that she quite imagined such an event might happen or such a mistake occur, without the information of it reaching across the sea. And if her Gor-don were dead, or lost to her in any other way, and her uncle were about to follow him, she knew that she should have no love to turn to on this earth, except the love of her adopted brother.

The quiet reliance which her tone expressed had made poor David's heart palpitate with hope, but the feeling was soon changed to disappointment when he heard the term by which she designated him. Since his return from Coimbatore he had never dared to mention the subject of his love for her; but that he had not relinquished the expectation that some day she might confess that it was mutual, was palpable

enough to himself whenever he heard her call him by the name of "brother."

As it struck his ear on the present occasion he rose hastily from the kneeling position he had assumed by her side, and recrossing the room to where he had thrown down his gardening implement, he picked it up again and prepared to quit the bungalow.

"He ought to have medical advice," he said, alluding to the condition of Père Joseph.

"He *must* have it," reiterated Véronique with determination, "and what reason is there that he should not? there is the money!"

"What money?" demanded the native quickly.

She stopped short again, colouring as before. She had been thinking of the hundred pounds left by Gordon Romilly for her benefit, but she could not tell David so. Her confusion aroused all his former suspicion.

"What money?" he re-demanded angrily,

striking his hoe against the floor, "is this another secret, Véronique; another proof of the Englishman's generosity to Père Joseph and thyself? Speak—or thou wilt drive me to think the worst of thee!"

"Oh, David! David!" sobbed the girl, frightened by the energy of his manner, "how unkind, how unreasonable thou art! What have I done that thou shouldst look at me like that? Am I not thy sister as I have ever been? Ah! how unfortunate, how miserable I am! I wish that I might die with *mon père*, and never see this wretched world again!"

By her tears, by the abandonment of her sorrow, David was softened in an instant. All the fire of jealousy, the scorn of suspicion, the malice of revenge, faded out of his dark face as if by magic; the expression of his eyes, which had become fierce and hard, melted beneath this appeal to his tenderness, and his clenched hands relaxed until they became pliable as those of a child.

"Véronique, *ma sœur*, forgive me! I

am a brute, I am a devil to have frightened thee like this; but there is hot, black blood running in my veins, and I cannot bear even a suspicion of thy perfect truth and purity. Thou hast forbidden me to speak of what I feel for thee," (as he uttered these words he was aware that the form round which his arms were thrown, drew farther from him, and he bit his lip to hinder his giving vent to the annoyance which the action caused) "but putting all that to one side, remember, Véronique, that whilst I exist thou canst never be alone in this world. If it pleases *le bon Dieu* to take *notre père* before we feel that we can spare him," (at this the sobs of Véronique commenced again) "I will work for thee, strive for thee, toil for thee—aye! my arms are strong enough for that if not to hold thy love!—and think myself well paid in knowing that *thy brother* is nearer to thee than any other living thing. Couldst thou say so much, Véronique, were Père Joseph not alive?"

He regarded her earnestly, peering into

her face with his black eyes as though he would be answered, whether she liked the task or no. But Véronique, without the certainty that her beloved was dead, how could she satisfy him ?

"I do not know. I cannot tell," she stammered, "David ! I shall always love thee ! always look on thee as my best friend ! but thou must not ask for more."

He unloosed the hold which he still maintained about her figure, and heaving a deep sigh, walked out into the little garden.

But Véronique could not forget the conversation they had held about her uncle's health, and when the priest returned home that day, wearied and unstrung by the performance of duties for which he was no longer capable, and she had carefully administered to his comforts, she placed herself upon a low stool at his feet, and with an averted face ventured to allude to the subject of his illness.

"*Mon père !*"

"*Mon enfant!*" was the fond reply, and as he spoke Père Joseph laid his hand upon her head with so tender and fatherly a pressure that the girl had difficulty in proceeding.

"You are not well, *mon père*, and we are grieved to see it, David and I; and we want you at once to consult a doctor, and to get some medicine to cure yourself."

"And what if I have already done so, Véronique?"

"You have, and are no better?" she exclaimed looking up in alarm.

"No, *mon enfant*," he replied quietly, and the way in which he drew her head down on his knee was intended to soothe and reassure her beneath the misfortune that was coming, "I am not better, and I never shall be. I am going to leave thee, Véronique."

"Oh! *mon père, mon père!*" and the worn face, still sheltered by his caressing hand, was turned against his knee and wept there silently. There was a pause of

several minutes, and when it was concluded, Père Joseph, as naturally as though no revelation of any moment had passed between them, said—

"And what wilt thou do when I am gone, Véronique?"

"How can I tell—how can I tell?" she said wildly, "I have had no time to think."

"Think now, my child! Let me speak to thee and advise thee whilst I can. 'The night cometh when no man may work.'"

"I shall go to England," she whispered softly. "I shall go to England to find out what has come between my Gor-don and myself; and if he is dead and thou art dead, I care not how soon I may come after you."

"*Mon enfant*," said Père Joseph, sadly, "he is not dead: were it the case, we must have heard of it!"

"Then he thinks that I am so!" she answered, quickly.

"How can that be, my child, when you

have written to him regularly, and sent the letters to an address provided by himself."

"He has not received them," maintained the girl, confidently.

"What! not one out of half a dozen, or more? Véronique, thou art deceiving thyself."

She shook her head—though sadly.

"*Mon père,* I know that some great suspicion has grown up in your breast against my Gor-don, but I cannot share it. I know all that you would tell me, that he might have written, that he might have come, that all has not happened as he said it would, and yet I believe in him. I believe that he is true, that he loves me still, that he mourns for me at this present moment, and that if he could, he would be by my side."

"But how then do you account for this total silence, this apparent forgetfulness, this desertion, Véronique? Remember! it is five months since he left us!"

She shuddered slightly, but she did not waver.

"I can account for nothing," she answered, simply, "but *mon père*, I can believe, I can believe, and trust, and love him," and with uplifted eyes: "*j'en aurai la force, je le jure à genoux.*"

"Véronique! I cannot leave thee in such error," exclaimed the priest excitedly, "he has deceived thee, he has deceived us both, it is impossible it can be otherwise. Oh, my sins! my foul sins of pride and of ambition! how does their heavy punishment weigh me down into the grave. Instead of considering only thine eternal welfare, I hoped to secure for thee a better temporal position, and a station in the world far above what I should have desired. I have not been contented with the simple blessings Providence ordained for me. I craved for grander and more carnal ones, and I am bitterly requited for my wrong doing. I thought to raise thee to a pinnacle of envy, oh! my child, and I have ground thine innocence to the dust instead. *Mon Dieu, mon Dieu! pardonnez moi tous mes pêchés.*"

He raised his eyes to heaven as he spoke, and clasping his hands together, burst into a weak flood of tears. Véronique was shocked and moved at his distress, but the self-accusation which had preceded it, had not the least effect on her composure.

"*Mon père,*" she answered, brokenly, "no mortal can expect to be in all things free from error, and you did it for the best. And do you think I would undo it if I could? You gave my Gor-don to me for three weeks, three weeks so happy and so blest, that all the misery of this suspense cannot wipe out the memory of a bliss, that did I never see him more, would be enough to live on till my dying day. Do not reproach yourself, *mon père*, this silence is an accident, an error which will be explained away as soon as Gor-don comes again: and till that time, I am content to wait and trust him."

He had been about to tell her of the discovery he had made of Captain Romilly's faith, but as he gazed upon her innocent, unsuspicious face, he felt his courage coze

away. She so implicitly believed herself to be his wife, her credence in his loyalty was so unlimited, her assurance so undaunted that he was neither careless nor forgetful, that Père Joseph asked himself what benefit he should do her by shaking to the centre, all this childlike trust. If he once made Véronique believe that she was both ruined and deserted, to what further depths of misery might not despair propel her, and if his worst suspicions respecting Gordon Romilly were true, would not the knowledge of her dishonoured name be the cruellest legacy he could leave his injured child? Added to which, he could not quite abandon his own hope; he could not bring himself at once to accept the truth that Véronique had been betrayed; he still clung, though almost unconsciously, to the frail chance that what the girl believed was true, and that accident, or the interference of Captain Romilly's friends, might be the reason of their temporary separation. Yet, he could not but be aware that if his niece had seen the last of her grand lover,

the best thing she could do would be to hold her tongue upon the subject, and that an acknowledgment of the mock ceremony which had taken place between them, would utterly ruin all prospect of her making a more suitable marriage in the future. And he feared lest Véronique, left to her own discretion, would blab the secret of what was so true, both far and wide, and make herself the laughing-stock of the cantonment; and his old sin of pride rose up against the notion, and led him to caution her anew.

"Véronique, when I am gone, remember that your marriage is a secret, and that you must keep it so, until you meet with Gordon Romilly again."

"It was his wish," she murmured, "I am not likely to forget it."

"And if he never comes to claim you, Véronique, or if you never meet him more, what then?"

"That is impossible, *mon père*, unless he is in heaven. When thou art gone, I will not rest until I find him."

"And should he be in heaven, Véronique?" replied Père Joseph, humouring her.

"Then I will seek some work to do for heaven, until the good God calls me there."

"May He bless thee, *mon enfant*, for ever, and take more care of thee than I have done."

The same night when Véronique had gone to bed, to weep in private over the fresh ill in store for her, Père Joseph spoke long and earnestly to his adopted son, and broke to him the tidings he had communicated to his niece. Whether he might live for days, or weeks, or months, it was impossible to say: but the fiat had gone forth that death was not far off, and to himself it seemed that he already had caught sight of the fingers of his beckoning hand.

David heard the news in silence, though the heaving of his broad chest and the nervous clenching of his muscular hands shewed how much he was moved by its reception: for he loved the good priest like a father, and had ever shown him the

dutiful obedience of a son. Père Joseph alluded to this fact in the course of their conversation, and thanked the young man for it.

"You are very dear to me, *mon fils*," he said, "no child of my own loins could have been dearer, and in your charge I leave the most precious thing which I possess. I leave you Véronique, David, as a dear sister, nothing more: to be loved, helped, and protected, nothing more; unless in God's good time more should come of her own free will. But meanwhile, without trying to thwart her inclinations, aid her by all means in your power, lose sight of her as little as you can, and stand up for her, David, stand up like a man for her good name, if ever it should be attacked!"

"Who could attack it?" said the young native fiercely, "Véronique is as pure as snow, *mon père*, I should like to meet the man who dares say otherwise."

"I know it, *mon fils*, as well as you can do, and yet the purest are not always safe from slander. But, be true to your own

honourable nature, be true to your love for her, your sister, and all will go well. And I have another charge to give you, David, I have—I have—collected, put by that is to say, a little money for my Véronique; it is only a thousand rupees—"

"So much as that," said David starting.

"Yes! is that an exorbitant sum to leave behind one after thirty years of toil?" replied the priest smiling, though rather uneasily. "Well! such as it is, *mon fils*, you will find it lodged in the hands of a Madras agent, the name and address of whom I have left amongst my private papers, and I desire that it is kept entirely for the use of Véronique, and that when she wishes to spend it, you will advise her how to lay it out most worthily. For she is but a child, David, a child in years as in spirit, but seventeen upon her latest birthday. Oh! it is cruel—cruel—that she should be so left!"

He had relapsed into his own thoughts, but the young man recalled him from them.

"She is not yet left alone, *mon père.* Thank God, the time is not arrived and may not come so soon as you imagine."

"She will never be alone whilst she has her brave good brother to protect her, David. Remember, that whenever I am called away, I leave your sister Véronique to you."

The care which the priest had taken to speak to both his children of their future on that evening, seemed prophetic, for another opportunity was never granted him.

He lay down that night cogitating in his own mind, whether or no, it would be wise for him to persuade Véronique to tell her adopted brother of her secret marriage, so that he might the better fight her battles with the world; but he was not permitted to bring his thoughts to a decision.

The hour, for which David had filially thanked God that it had not yet arrived, came but too soon, for the next day, Père Joseph was seized with an attack of Asiatic cholera, and his constitution, prostrated

by a long course of weakening illness, having no power to withstand so terrible a foe, succumbed to the malady, which, notwithstanding medical assistance, carried him off in six hours from the date of its commencement.

The shock of his death, so fearfully sudden to what they had anticipated, had a great effect upon both those whom he had left behind him, but David seemed to feel it most. The grief of the young native for the loss of his adopted father, was at first so violent, and afterwards so despairing, that it excited the sympathies not only of the doctor who had attended the priest during his brief illness, but of all those who witnessed his distress.

To David, Véronique appeared as though she did not nearly comprehend the magnitude of the bereavement which had befallen them. Her tearless woe, her apathetic voice, the quiet gravity with which she performed all the sad offices required of her, struck the afflicted son as signs of want of feeling, instead of being what they

were, the symptoms of a grief too deep to find any solace in outward expression. For if David had lost his staff and support, the friend and guide of his youth, to Véronique the world seemed crumbling away beneath her feet, as she looked upon the shrouded form of Père Joseph.

Yet even at that moment of her last adieu, something whispered to her that this was not her greatest sorrow, nor her greatest love. Even as her lips pressed, for the last time to all eternity, the marble brow of him who had truly been a father to her, Véronique realised for the first time, that she was a woman, independent, free, unshackled.

A woman, who would trust her husband to her dying hour; independent, to go forth into the world; free, to seek him where and how she chose—unshackled! ah never, from the cords of love which he had bound about her!

CHAPTER VIII.

DAVID'S LAST APPEAL.

"DAVID," said Véronique gently, "*je vais te quitter.*" It was the third evening after the funeral, and they were sitting together, sadly silent, and uncommunicative, in the front room of the bungalow, she, occupied with her mourning garments, and he, with chipping a hazel stick, to the carving of which he was paying but small attention. As soon as the tidings of Père Joseph's death had been spread abroad, a brother priest had come over from Coonoor to perform the office of interment for him; and hand in hand his adopted children had knelt beside his coffin, whilst the solemn mass for the dead, (solemn even when so imperfectly executed,) was being chanted

above his remains, and hardly realised they were to be parted from him, until the holy water was finally sprinkled on the pall, and the tender blessing "*Requiescat in Pace,*" dismissed the bearers with their sacred burden into the grave-yard which surrounded the little chapel.

But it was all over now, the first violence of their grief, at returning to the deserted bungalow, had expended itself, and they knew that they must settle something regarding their own future, for the house in which they lived belonged to the Roman Catholic Mission, and would have to be resigned to the next priest appointed to the duty.

David had never ceased thinking of what he should *like* to do, since the hour that his adopted father died; but he had not had the courage to communicate his thoughts to Véronique, and she had settled on her course of action, but, hitherto, refrained from telling it for the same reason. Now, as her soft voice broke the silence between them, the colour mounted high

into the native's cheek, and he commenced to whittle fast and furiously, as he replied,

"You are going to leave me, Véronique, but why, where would you go?"

"We cannot remain much longer in this home," she said evasively.

"True! but I will make another for you. What is it that you doubt? The strength of my arms, or the willingness of my heart, to work! both are at your service, Véronique."

"I know it, *mon frère*," she answered affectionately, "but—but—you do not consider, David. The time is come when you and I must seek a separate dwelling."

"Why?" demanded the native shortly.

The necessity of explaining herself made Véronique stammer.

"Because—oh! you must know it well enough, David—it is not usual—not *comme il faut*—for a young man and woman, who are not connected, to live in the same house together. The neighbours would talk;" and as the girl concluded and bent her

head over her work, her cheeks were scarlet, and David did not look much less confused.

"I am thy brother," he said quickly, but his fast beating heart denied the words.

"No! David, you are not my brother, except in my affections," answered Véronique, "and I know *mon père* would never have wished that we should live together, for I spoke with him upon this subject the night before his death;" and recalling the tenderness of that last conversation, the tears began to trickle down her cheeks. David saw them, and could not resist the impulse they created.

"Véronique," he exclaimed, throwing his knife and stick upon the table, and crossing the fireplace to where she now sat with her face buried in her hands, "if I may not work for you, and cherish you by the name of brother, give me a better right to do it. *Mon père* left you in my charge; his last words were that I was to love, help, and protect you as a sister only, un-

less you gave me more of your own free will. Give me more, Véronique—give me yourself for my dear wife, and in whatever part of the world you wish to dwell I will make you a home, such as you shall not be ashamed to live in, and work till my last breath to maintain it for you. Oh, Véronique, do not look at me like that"—(for the wife of Gordon Romilly had risen from her seat, and was gazing at him with horror that was almost aversion)—"you know that I love you; you have known it for a long time; and now that our dead father has sanctioned it with his last words, I entreat you not to refuse me hastily."

"He *sanctioned* it!" she exclaimed, almost breathless with surprise; "he sanctioned your attachment to me, David? it is impossible! you must be dreaming!"

"Dreaming!" repeated the young native indignantly; "is it likely I should dream on such a subject, when it has been the one desire of my heart for the last three years? Véronique, from the moment it was possible to love you otherwise I have never

loved you as a sister. I could not live happily with you as a sister. I must have you for my wife, for my own, for my very own ; and if any other man ever dared to glance at you, or smile at you, except in mere acquaintanceship, I would tear him asunder where he stood," and with knitted eyebrows, beneath which his eyes glowed like fire, David looked thoroughly capable of what he said. But his ardour and excitement only made Véronique shrink the further from him.

"Oh, no!" she cried with abhorrence at the mere idea; "no, no! it is impossible! it can never be! *Mon père* must have been raving. David, stand off!—stand away from me, I implore you! I cannot bear that you should either touch or look at me like that."

The feelings of her mind were so well expressed by her voice that the native's dark skin turned livid (as dark skins will when the blood recedes from them), and he ground his teeth together in his rage and disappointment.

"So!" he exclaimed, as soon as passion let him speak; "so, it has come to this! that the hands that have fed you, and carried you, and guided your baby feet, are unfit to touch you now; and the eyes that, day by day, have watched you slowly change from a little child into a woman, are bidden to turn away and look upon the beauty which has grown so dear to them no more. But I know the reason," he added fiercely, "the black hands were good enough for leading-strings, and the black breast was a patient pillow—but who would think of taking the one for life before the altar, or dream that the other held anything so unruly as a heart! *Oh, mon Dieu!*" continued the man vehemently, as he flung himself across the table, and concealed his face upon his outstretched arms; "*pourquoi ne m'avez vous pas crée blanc, ou pourquoi n'ai-je pas eu un cœur aussi noir que ma peau?*"

As he uttered this apostrophe to the Eternal, his chest heaved, his shoulders shook with the tempest of his emotion,

whilst the tears of disappointed pride and passion, which he could no longer restrain, forced their way through the closed fingers with which his eyes were covered.

Véronique looked on in silence ; dismay at the unlawful annoyance to which her secret marriage subjected her, and fear at the violence with which David received the rejection of his advances, for some while kept her speechless, but she could not view for long the distress of the man for whom she cared as for a brother, without responding to and sympathising with it. As she saw that he was weeping, her own eyes overflowed, and the first thing of which David became conscious was the touch of her little hand upon his stricken head.

"David, dear David! dear brother! for Heaven's sake, don't speak—don't think like that! I love you, David; I have loved you from a little child, ever since you used to carry me in those dear arms—and I have never loved any one so much, not in that way, before or after. You were father and mother and sister and brother in those

days, David; how could you think me so ungrateful as to forget it all?"

She had seated herself upon the table by his side by this time, and had taken possession of one of his dark hands.

"When I spoke to you just now, and said that marriage between us was an impossibility, I never thought a moment of the colour of your skin. I like your dark skin, David—I like all dark skins for the sake of yours, and if I could be your wife, the difference between our blood would make no difference to me. But it is not that! I swear it in the sight of Heaven! It is—it is, simply—because it *cannot be!*"

"You do not love me well enough!" he said sadly, as he raised his blood-shot eyes and gazed into her open countenance.

She stooped and kissed him on the forehead.

"I love you well enough," she answered quietly, "but I do not love you in that way. David! never mention this subject again between us. If you care to keep me as your sister, let this be the last of it, for you have had my answer."

"And you will never change your mind, Véronique?"

"*Never, never!*" she said, emphatically, shaking her head; "it is impossible! do not dream of it a moment more."

"I will not!" answered the young man firmly, as he raised himself from his forlorn position, and walked a little distance from her. "You have heard the last of it, Véronique! Henceforward, I will set myself to overcome this weakness, and to treat you only as my sister. Give me a little time, and I shall be myself again."

He walked out into the garden as he spoke, and when an hour afterwards he re-entered the bungalow, and resumed his old occupation of carving the hazel-stick, there was not a trace left of the storm of passion to which he had abandoned himself.

"Tell me your plans, Véronique," he said quietly, as he again took the seat opposite to hers—"that is, if you have made any—and let us consult together on the best method of carrying them out."

"I thought it would be a good thing,

David," commenced poor Véronique, whose eyes had become terribly swollen from the effects of her hour of solitude, "if I were to take the few things that I wish to keep, and go and stay with the Wards until you shall have sold off the remainder. Mrs. Ward has kindly asked me to do so, until I shall have decided on my future actions."

"But why sell off your furniture?" demanded the native, in surprise, (for that portion which Gordon Romilly had provided had been left to Véronique, and the remainder to himself), "if you will not live with me, you still must have a home, and the furniture will be useful to you wherever you may go."

"But — but—I do not think that I shall stay in India, David!" she said, timidly.

"Not stay in India!" The clasp-knife fell from David's hand in his surprise; "why, where then wouldst thou go?"

"I want to go to England," replied Véronique, in a low voice; and then, fear-

ful lest her reason for wishing to do so should be divined, she added, hurriedly, "that is to say, I want to go to Rêve, to my mother's family; and of course to get there I must visit England first."

"And why 'of course?'" demanded David, abruptly.

"Because I must work my way there, David. Mrs. Ward says there is no other plan, and I can only do that by accompanying some lady on the voyage to England first, and then procuring another service, if I wish it, over into Belgium. And it is until such an opportunity occurs for me to go home, that Mrs. Ward has asked me to take up my residence beneath her roof. So you see that I shall not want my furniture, David."

"You seem to have settled it all very nicely between yourselves," said the young man, gloomily, as he threw his hazel stick upon the fire, and leant back in his chair; "but there is no need for you to work your way home in such a roundabout fashion, Véronique. *Mon père* left one thousand

rupees behind him for your sole use, and that will be more than enough to pay your expenses to Belgium—I am sure he would never have wished that you should enter any one's service."

She had anticipated some such objections on his part, and was prepared to meet them, for if all her money were expended in sending her direct to Rêve, by what means could she prosecute her search for Gor-don?

"No, no! David!" she replied, "that must not be; suppose my mother's family were not inclined to welcome me, what should I do without money in a strange land? Let me go home, as I desire—I shall accept no menial office, nor undertake to do anything of which *mon père* would have had reason to be ashamed, but by that means I shall cross the sea, ah!" (with a sudden shudder), "that dreadful sea! without expense and with protection; and indeed Mrs. Ward says, that it would be almost impossible for a young woman, in my position, to travel about alone—I am

not a lady, remember, David, whom men would be afraid to insult; I am only a poor girl, and I shall be thrown, may be, amongst a rough set. But if I have a mistress to appeal to, I shall be, comparatively speaking, safe."

"You shall be safe enough," muttered David, in a tone so low that she hardly caught the meaning of his words, "and if you are determined to leave India, Véronique, I suppose it must be so; but what about the pony, is he to be sold with the furniture?"

"Shall you stay here, David, do you think?"

"I cannot say for certain, Véronique, —perhaps yes, and perhaps no."

"Will you keep the Pegu for my sake?" she asked, more shyly.

"Thank you! but I would rather not. I might not know what to do with him should I move about."

"Then he must be sold also," concluded Véronique, with a deep sigh.

David echoed it, but he made no further

attempt to shake her resolution, and in the course of a few days, she had removed, with the few articles she wished to preserve, to the protection of Mrs. Ward.

Ever since the occurrence of the terrible accident by which their child had met her death, the missionary and his wife had evinced a very cordial interest in the young girl who had been their staff and stay on that occasion, which rendered their offer to her of a temporary asylum, in the time of her own bereavement, a natural sequence, and they united in pouring forth their best powers of consolation in her behalf; and not without effect, for in a few weeks, Mrs. Ward, who had been puzzled to understand why Véronique should lose her health and spirits before her uncle's death, had the pleasure to see both, in some measure, return; and after her wish to give her services to a lady on the voyage home in exchange for her passage-money, had been well bruited abroad, and she had received and accepted an offer to accompany the wife of Colonel Dowdson, who was about to

leave Madras in the course of the following month, Véronique was almost herself again.

It is true that she had still to endure the misery of utter silence on the part of Gordon Romilly, (that profound darkness, from which our cry upon the beloved one's name falls back on our own soul, and withers it—than which the certainty of woe is almost better), but yet Hope was again busy in her heart. She was so young, she had so many of her childish feelings and ideas still left to her—so few of her childish anticipations had been rooted up, or destroyed, that Véronique could not but believe that to be in the same place with Gordon Romilly, in the same country, perhaps the same town, was to see and speak to him ; and to see and speak to him was to have all the miserable misconceptions which had risen between them, swept away for ever. And so she looked forward with eagerness to the day when she should leave the Hills, the green, billowy hills, in whose bosom she had been nurtured, where lay

the cold remains of her adopted father, which still contained a warm heart beating for her—the only heart, had Véronique but known it, which she could call her own.

She panted to exchange their fresh breezes for the fevered and blistering plains of Madras; to take her feet off their firm pathways, and plant them on the planked decks trembling above the deep and trackless ocean, of which she entertained an unconquerable dread; to barter her life of liberty and social freedom for the service of a Mrs. Colonel Dowdson.

Mrs. Ward, notwithstanding the veil with which Véronique attempted to conceal her feelings, perceived her eagerness to be gone, and attributed it to a natural desire to quit the country where she had been called upon to suffer, for the young, who are unused to misery, generally imagine that out of sight is out of mind, and it is only after many an endeavour to shirk that which is inevitable, that we arrive at the knowledge that outward objects have very

little effect in lightening or increasing a burden of the soul.

David also perceived the anxiety of Véronique to leave the Neilgherries, and with a heart quickened by affection, guessed the cause, although he had little conception of how much right she possessed to follow the Englishman of whom he was so jealous.

The idea that she wished to follow him, or at all events to be again thrown in his way, was but a half-formed idea with her adopted brother, but yet of sufficient strength to make him resolve that the promise which Père Joseph had demanded of him, that, as far as possible, he should not lose sight of Véronique, should be fulfilled.

Meanwhile, the girl, whom circumstances were fast ripening to a woman, led forth into the world by that invisible cord of love bound so tightly about her heart that all her sense of feeling seemed to centre there, received the summons to join her employer at Madras with gratitude, and

escorted by David, who insisted upon accompanying her to her destination, set out without delay for the abode of Mrs. Colonel Dowdson.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. COLONEL DOWDSON'S LEVÉE.

MRS. COLONEL DOWDSON, as she loved to style herself, was a very great lady, at least in her own estimation, and there was no one in Madras found bold enough to gainsay her. She had been an ordinary woman, somewhat soured by previous disappointments, and considerably past her *première jeunesse*, when, as her last resource, she had accepted the hand of a "bread and cheese" lieutenant in the 99th Madras Native Infantry, and until the luckless Dowdson had scaled the interminable ladder of lieutenants and captains which stretched above him, (a slow process when promotion is not to be effected by

purchase money), his existence was said to have been anything but an enviable one. Accomplished at last, however, he had the happiness also at the same time to rise considerably in his lady's estimation, for to be a major's wife was not quite so common a lot in her idea; still, there are always two or three majors attached to each regiment, and the ambitious mind of Mrs. Dowdson was not completely satisfied until her husband could write himself down a "pucka" Colonel, and reign in unapproachable glory, after which she felt considerably better, and more in charity with herself, and all womankind.

Colonels might be as plentiful as blackberries outside the 99th, but one only at a time could command that corps, and whilst he held that position, Mrs. Colonel Dowdson believed her sway to be as unlimited as that of her husband. She took every salute of the inferior officers as intended for herself, bowed graciously when a guard turned out to present arms to their Colonel, and made a point, as each fresh subaltern

joined the regiment, of giving a dinner-party, in order that she might in proper form present him to his brother officers. In fact, Mrs. Dowdson was in her element, prosperity appeared to have no power to affect her condescension, she grew more and more gracious the higher her husband rose in the army, and the lower the military rank of the visitor she entertained, the greater was the amiability with which she patronised him. She was perfectly satisfied with herself, her house, and everything that belonged to her, and she had but one aspiration left, to write herself down "Mrs. General Dowdson," and die.

After that climax of good fortune, that tottering pinnacle of human happiness, Mrs. Colonel Dowdson considered there could be nothing more worth living for. The 99th had been stationed at Madras for more than two years, and the Colonel's house, for a residence in that climate, was everything that could be desired. English furniture and English books, French ornaments and French chintzes, vied with Java matting

and India china, to render the drawing-room a *melée* of all that was curious and comfortable, and no one was better aware of the value of the articles contained in it than their owner. There was not a lady in the regiment, from poor Mrs. Clifford, who would have a baby every year, until her young husband in sheer despair sent her home to her parents again, to Mrs. Lennard, the major's wife, who was reputed to have been an heiress, who could boast of such a drawing-room, or such a dinner-table, or such a carriage, as Mrs. Colonel Dowdson, and Mrs. Colonel Dowdson knew the fact well, and appreciated it still more. Yet she had a strange way of making others arrive at the same conclusion, for it was by depreciating her possessions that she led her friends to remark on the superiority of them to their own. She called her large wide house her "humble cot," her tall Arab horses her "pretty ponies," and spoke of the expensively embroidered fabrics which she trailed about the floors after her as "nice light things for summer wear,"

and women who had been unused to this style of deception, or were not sharp enough to distinguish the "pride which apes," from true humility, really imagined that the Colonel's wife thought what she said, and were proportionately impressed with an idea of her importance. For if Mrs. Dowdson thought so little of such grand things, what must she *not* have been accustomed to in days gone by? If her carriage horses of sixteen hands high, were only "pretty ponies" in her eyes, to what height must not her former pairs have attained? Thus they argued from conclusions, the falsest style of argument that we can follow, and Mrs. Colonel Dowdson, without any cleverness of her own, had sufficient cunning to take advantage of their ignorance.

This was the person to whom Véronique had engaged to give her services in return for a passage to England, for the eventful epoch had now arrived when the Dowdsons were to revisit their native country, a circumstance which imbued the Colonel's wife

with even a greater share of importance in the sight of the regimental ladies than before, for all that she now did or said, was with a reference to the magic name of "home."

It was the first occasion of her return there, after a residence of twenty years in India, and she had little doubt but that she should be received on landing with as much pomp and just as many honours as though the Colonel and herself had been discharged from a "masoolah" boat on the strand of Madras. What she was to do in England, see in England, and hear in England, formed the chief topic of her friends' conversation; but Mrs. Colonel Dowdson was a great deal too well informed, too elegant, and too certain of what was before her, to express any vulgar curiosity on the subject, and when a young lady who had just landed in Madras, suggested that as she would arrive home in the early spring, she would find something warmer than Indian muslins very acceptable as she went up the Channel, she received so decided a

rebuff, that she wrote down in her journal that same evening that the residents of Madras were not remarkable for a spirit of gratitude.

It may perhaps be thought strange that so grand a lady as Mrs. Colonel Dowdson should be going home in a sailing vessel round the Cape, instead of making the overland journey, which is at once so much more pleasant and expeditious; but all is not gold that glitters, and although it is a fine thing to be the wife of a real Colonel in the Madras Native Infantry, the gold lace on their uniforms is generally the heaviest bullion which Her Majesty's servants carry about with them, when they throw up their situations to take a holiday back to the old country. Therefore the Colonel, who had a juster notion of home expenses than his better half, had very wisely secured their berths in the A 1 fast sailing passenger vessel, "Earl of Hardbake," belonging to those celebrated agents, Messrs. Verdigris and Son, which was advertised to sail early in the month of De-

cember, and by which he had the further opportunity of going home in charge of troops.

Returning to England by "long sea," had been a bitter pill for Mrs. Dowdson to swallow, until she remembered that she could throw all the blame of it upon the delicate health of the "poor dear Colonel," and that the protracted voyage entailed the necessity of a servant to wait upon her, which she would have been obliged to do without by the other route. An English servant Mrs. Dowdson was determined to have, not only because it was cheaper, (native women always requiring to be sent back to India, and receive a "bonus" into the bargain), but that to speak of "my lady's maid," sounded so very much better than "my ayah," and as if she had been accustomed to one all her life. And when she heard, through her friend General Perkins on the Hills, that not only was the maid in question English, but French, Mrs. Dowdson's satisfaction was complete. Not that she could speak a word of the latter

language, but that a French lady's maid was what she believed no woman at that moment in Madras (not even the wife of the reigning governor) possessed.

From the day that she heard of the nationality of Véronique, she could not rest until she had despatched a summons for her, which as her services were only engaged for the voyage, she could not well do more than a week before sailing. At that time, however, she desired General Perkins to order the young woman to start at once for Madras, and a few days afterwards she was informed by her native servant that the "English missy" had arrived, and was waiting to speak to her. Mrs. Colonel Dowdson, who was reclining on a sofa in her dressing-room, and directing the work of half-a-dozen tailors employed upon her outfit for the voyage, ordered the native to shew the young woman in there.

Véronique was terribly nervous; David, who had accompanied her from the hills, had brought her to the very door of Colonel Dowdson's house; but he knew that he

must leave her then, and the way in which she clung to him and begged him not to quit her, made the parting hard for both of them.

"I shall not leave Madras till thou art gone, Véronique; I shall stay here till the very last; thou wilt see me again; dost thou think that I could go without a last adieu?" said David earnestly, and under that promise she let him depart, although it was with a tear-stained countenance and very sorrowful expression, that she presented herself before her future mistress. As she entered the door of the dressing-room Mrs. Dowdson raised her eyes expectantly to her figure, but her first glance was one of disappointment. Véronique, with her small, slight shape, her short petticoats, her simple, childish face, and her hair hanging in two long tails on either side of her head, looked more like a school-girl than a lady's maid, and anything but calculated to swell the importance of Mrs. Colonel Dowdson's retinue.

"Are you the young woman from the

hills ?" she demanded with unpleasant surprise, "whom General Perkins has engaged to accompany me to England ? Why, you are only a child."

"A child, Madame !" replied Véronique, bridling with offended dignity as she recalled the image of Gordon Romilly and the remembrance that she was his wife, and yet half ready to verify the lady's accusation by melting into tears. "I was seventeen on my last birthday."

"Were you ? well that's young enough, and you don't look more than fifteen, particularly with your hair done in that fashion. Oh, dear ! I don't think you'll do at all. I understood from General Perkins that you were a full-grown woman."

Véronique thought of the breaking-up of her home, of the expenses of her journey, of the delay which Mrs. Dowdson's dissatisfaction might occasion, and threw off her timidity in the fear of losing her situation.

"Indeed, Madame, I am not so young as I appear to be, and I will do my hair in

any way that you like best. Mrs. Ward said she thought I might be required to wear caps, and I am ready to do exactly as you wish. I have had no time to arrange myself this morning, for I came here straight from the last bungalow; but I am sure you will find that when my hair is twisted round my head, I look quite old enough to be your lady's maid. Pray! Madame, do not say that I am not fit for the situation until you see how I look when my hair is properly arranged."

With her large eyes beaming from anxiety, her small, clasped hands, and her graceful figure bent forward with expectation, Véronique made so pretty a picture that Mrs. Colonel Dowdson had not the heart to damp her ardour further. She was not an ill-natured woman, she was only insufferably stuck-up and self-conceited, and she began at once to consider what her acquaintances would say and think, were she to introduce the girl to them as a *protegée*, whom she was charitably taking home to restore to her friends and

family. After all, it would sound better even than having a French lady's maid, and the convenience of the arrangement would remain unaltered.

"Very well! very well," she replied in answer to Véronique's appeal, "we will settle all that afterwards, and meanwhile my ayah shall show you to your room, and when you are rested you can dress your hair in a somewhat more civilised fashion, for I have some ladies to spend the evening with me to-night, and I shall want you to pour out the coffee and tea for them. By the way, what is your name?"

"Véronique, Madame."

"Veronick!" repeated Mrs. Dowdson, "I never heard of such a name. What is your surname? I think the General mentioned it, but it has slipped my memory."

"Romilly, Madame," was trembling upon the girl's tongue, but she coloured, corrected herself, and said "Moore" instead.

"Oh! I can't call you 'Moore'" replied

the Colonel's lady, who did not seem quite certain whether the syllable were French or English, "have you no other name?"

"Marie, Madame," said Véronique gently.

"Oh, Mar-rie! yes, that will do much better, so mind I shall call you so," interposed her patroness, and then Mar-rie, thoroughly wearied both in body and soul, was dismissed to her own apartment and permitted to remain in peace.

She had no reason to complain of the manner in which it had been prepared for her reception, for everything was as nice as though the room had been destined for a lady's use, and Véronique found that at all events as long as she remained in Madras, she was likely to be as well served as her mistress. As soon as the small box which she had been enabled to bring in the transit with her, had been unpacked, and she had refreshed herself with a cold bath, she lay down on the bed, and fell into a slumber which lasted until the fierce Indian sun had sunk beneath the horizon, and the

sound of carriage-wheels and horses' hoofs, and the voices of children at play witnessed that the day of the cantonment had commenced, and woke her up to the conviction that she must have slept for several hours. Then the ayah, who had crouched outside her door to watch for her awaking, brought in some dinner on a tray; and Véronique got off the bed, feeling almost ashamed to be so waited on, but at the same time very much interested by the novelty of the situation in which she found herself, and quite convinced that Mrs. Dowdson must be as grand as she seemed affable. She had scarcely finished her dinner, and arranged her hair and dress to her own satisfaction, when the carriage returned from the band with the Colonel and his wife, and the former was heard calling loudly in Hindustani for his "chokra" to come and help him in his dressing, whilst the latter popped her head into the apartment of her lady's maid.

"Mar-rie!"

"*Oui*, Madame!" replied Véronique,

rising at the sound, and then blushing and correcting herself she added, "*pardon*, I meant to say, yes, Madame!"

"Oh! you can say '*wee*' as much as ever you like to me!" exclaimed her mistress, "in fact, I would rather you did say 'wee,' Mar-rie, because it sounds better. Are you ready for me when I shall want you?"

"Quite ready, Madame. Is my hair dressed to your satisfaction now?" and Véronique displayed a little head, round which the thick long plaits were turned and twisted until they crowned its summit.

"Oh, yes! that will do; only I think you have got a great deal too much of it. However, I have no time to talk of that now. There is a public dinner at the mess to-night, at which the Colonel, of course, must be present, and I have a little levée at home of all the ladies of the regiment, so I wish you to be in the room, and attend to the tea and coffee for me. I suppose you can do that?"

"Yes, Madame," said Véronique, smiling, "and how soon shall you require me?"

"Not for an hour; I shall take my dinner first, and during that time, you can walk in the 'compound' if you like. As everything is so new to you, I shall let my ayah dress me this evening, and you can begin that part of your duty to-morrow." Saying which, Mrs. Dowdson disappeared, and Véronique, who was still dreadfully nervous of coming in contact with her new mistress, thankful of the permission accorded her, wandered away in the large, straggling, shady enclosure which was dignified by the name of garden, wondering much at all she saw around her, and remembering at every turn, with flushed cheeks and quickening pulses, that her Gor-don had lived in that place and might have trod the very path she stood upon, and that she was on her road to meet him.

One of Mrs. Dowdson's most felicitous modes of patronising the ladies of the 99th, was to hold, what she termed, a "levée"

whenever the regiment gave a public dinner, and rally the females round her as their acknowledged head, at the same time that the Colonel did the honours of the mess-table. If there was one thing that the wives of the 99th M. N. I. disliked more than another, it was these occasional "levées," these "tabby" meetings, where they all sat and yawned in each other's faces, secretly longing for the sound of their husbands' footsteps, as, one after another, the officers left the mess and called to take them home. But woe to the woman sufficiently hardy to remonstrate with her lord and master, on the obligation of dancing attendance on his colonel's wife, or to plead previous engagements, disinclination, or nursery duties, as an excuse for non-presentation.

"My dear!" was the invariable rejoinder, "if you offend Mrs. Dowdson you will make it most uncommonly disagreeable for me with the Colonel. I know she's a spiteful old cat, and that you have not two ideas in common, but after all, it only comes

about once a month, and you must conciliate her as much as possible."

"But George," perhaps the long-suffering female would feebly remonstrate, "just see how rude she was to me last time I went about my blue silk, and how she made remarks upon poor baby's nose before all the band. I wouldn't have minded what she said of my dress, but I won't have my baby laughed at, and I am sure his nose is just like yours—and—and—" the remainder of the remonstrance lost in tears.

"Oh! tut, tut, tut!" the husband would impatiently reply, "these are all women's affairs you know, and I can't have them interfere with my prospects. A word from her to the Colonel would make me lose my present appointment, and you don't know in how many ways a commanding officer can make himself unpleasant in the regiment, if he chooses. You mustn't mind what she says about your dress, Anna Maria, you must just behave as though you didn't hear it, and as for the youngster's nose, why you

know it is all jealousy. She'd be precious glad to have a baby of her own, nose or no nose, so be thankful for your mercies, and for heaven's sake keep me out of a row with the Colonel, or I shall feel inclined to throw the dress, and the baby, and yourself, all into the sea together."

And thus adjured and trembling for her husband's appointment, poor Anna Maria would sit out the next female levée, with smiles upon her face but rancour in her heart, and hating herself the while for seeming what she was not, even in so pious a cause.

The evening in question was no exception to the general rule. By the time that the mess-dinner commenced, some seven or eight ladies were assembled in Mrs. Colonel Dowdson's drawing-room, talking furtively to one another, or trying to conceal their *ennui* behind the covers of albums or annuals, whilst a select few gathered about their hostess, whom they facetiously termed their "commanding officer," and meekly swallowed the advice on their behaviour, or

remarks on their costumes, which she labelled out as freely as though she had been their registered and appointed Mentor.

Véronique, standing at a side table before the tea and coffee equipage, and utterly ignorant of the forms of worship adopted by the devotees of the great god Rank, listened with innocent amazement to the conflictory remarks which reached her from every side, and it was not until the evening was concluded that she seemed to take in the real state of the case, and to comprehend that the reason the actions of the ladies of the 99th did not always tally with their words, was because in the religion which, by compulsion or of their own free will, they followed, policy invariably takes precedence of truth.

"My dear Mrs. Dowdson," exclaimed a pale little lady with buff hair and a buff complexion, who was robed in a faded blue gauze, "is that your French maid ?" glancing towards Véronique, (for the engagement of a foreign lady's maid for their Colonel's wife, had not been kept a secret from the

99th). "How very youthful she appears to be."

"Well, yes! that is, not exactly," replied Mrs. Dowdson, in a low voice, and somewhat entangled, "but I'll tell you all about it presently," and then turning to Véronique, she added: "Mar-rie, fetch me a pocket-handkerchief."

"*Oui*, Madame!" replied Véronique, as she prepared to go in search of her mistress's ayah.

"Dear me, can't she speak any English?" said one of the ladies enthusiastically.

"Well, I'm sure I can hardly tell!" replied Mrs. Dowdson as though she had been speaking nothing but French herself with the new arrival. "Mar-rie, can you speak any English?"

"Yes, Madame, I speak it well," said Véronique, smiling at the question, and wondering that Mrs. Dowdson had considered it necessary.

"I am glad she can speak it, poor child," remarked the Colonel's lady, humanely, as the girl left the room, "for she would have

found it so awkward on board ship, with no one, perhaps, to understand her but myself."

"Oh! then she *is* your new lady's maid," concluded the buff-coloured lady.

"Well, I hardly like to call her so," replied Mrs. Dowdson, looking the picture of modest benevolence, "because, although of course, the poor girl would wish to shew all the gratitude in her power, it is not exactly a case of services, and payment, and so forth, between us. The fact is," dropping her voice almost to a whisper, "she is an orphan, left in the country under very sad circumstances, without a protector, and I feel that I shall not be easy until I see she has been restored to her friends in Belgium."

Here arose a chorus of sympathetic laudation from the ladies of the 99th, a pæon of praise of which the upshot was, that it was "just like Mrs. Dowdson to have thought of it," but their commanding officer raised her hand to enforce silence.

"Hush, hush!" she exclaimed, professing

to be quite shocked at the ovation, "it is nothing, a mere trifle, who could have done otherwise? and to look after her will be an amusement for me on this long, dreary voyage, which the poor, dear Colonel's health obliges us to take. But here comes Mar-rie, so pray, not another word upon the subject."

"What a sweet dress you have on, dear Mrs. Dowdson," remarked one of her visitors with a view to change it easily, "a *chiné* silk, is it not?"

"Oh! dear no! only a *châlé*," was the answer, given with supreme indifference, "a pretty enough thing, but only fit for some such little quiet evening as the present. However, it is long enough to do good service in sweeping the floors, if nothing else, and saves the poor servants some trouble when they bring their brooms in of a morning."

"Oh! dear—ah! dear! isn't that just like Mrs. Dowdson," remarked her former questioner, appealing to the circle of "tab-

bies." "But surely it is very like a *chiné* you wore last month?"

"You mean a green and white one," replied Mrs. Dowdson, smiling, "I gave that away to Mrs. Simpson!"

"No! indeed! — how very good of you!"

"Oh! it was nothing—nothing—" said the Colonel's lady, with the same deprecating air that she had used before. "Poor Mrs. Simpson always had colds and sore throats, and her husband told me he was sure it was because she would drive to the band in muslin dresses, so I just rolled up my *chiné* silk into a bundle, and sent it off to her at once, with a message not to let me see her out in the evening again in a thin dress, or I would just send her home."

"Ha! ha! ha! he! he! he!" tittered the ladies of the 99th, though two or three had turned very red at Mrs. Dowdson's speech, and one rose and walked towards the verandah.

"A 'chit' from Snaffles, Mem Sahib," said a native servant, bringing in a note

upon a salver, and presenting it to his mistress.

She broke the seal and read it; and now it was her turn to grow red and look confused.

"Most unaccountable behaviour," she exclaimed, "most unprecedented! This is the very last I have to do with Mrs. Snaffles."

"Dear Mrs. Dowdson, what is it?"

"Well, my dear ladies! I think you will scarcely credit such a proceeding. I understood from the Colonel that Mr. Snaffles was going to send his wife to Calcutta by the next steamer, to spend a month with her sister, who has just arrived there, and I was very sorry to hear it. Mr. Snaffles, of course, poor, dear man, is a very good, well-meaning fellow, but quite led by his wife, and blind—perfectly blind to anything she may choose to do. And there was young Robertson—who was always at the house, singing with her, and riding with her, and so forth—went to Calcutta himself only a fortnight ago, to take up some civil

appointment he had been offered there. Oh! I cannot bear such underhand doings —I could not see them and hold my tongue."

"Everybody was talking about young Robertson and Mrs. Snaffles," interposed the buff female, who appeared to be Mrs. Dowdson's greatest toady.

"Everybody talks about everybody, here," remarked the lady who was standing by the window.

"But not without cause, Mrs. Duncan, not without cause," interrupted Mrs. Dowdson, sharply, "and in my position, I considered it a duty, for the credit of the regiment, to write to Mrs. Snaffles, and tell her that her place was to remain at home with her husband and children, instead of flying about the country alone."

"And what is her answer?" demanded Mrs. Duncan, turning towards the speaker.

"Her answer is like herself," said Mrs. Dowdson, spitefully, "forward, impudent, and presuming. It reflects so little credit

on the writer that I have no hesitation in making it public—

"'My Dear Mrs. Dowdson,

"'I thank you for the good intentions, by which, I presume, the advice you have been pleased to send me, was dictated, but as long as my husband remains what he is—the head and ruler of this household—I consider myself accountable to no one but himself for anything I may choose to do, or think, or say. Under the circumstances, however, I hardly imagine my company this evening would be productive of any pleasure to you, and therefore you must permit me to decline your invitation.

"'Yours sincerely,

"'Laura Snaffles.'"

"Dear! dear! how *could* she?" exclaimed several of the ladies in a breath, "how very thoughtless of her! But perhaps she does not mean all that she says."

"I shall take her words as she has written them," replied Mrs. Dowdson, with

awful severity. "From this day I wash my hands clean of Mrs. Snaffles, and the lieutenant must be answerable for his wife's proceedings. Excuse me, ladies, for a minute," and, with the note in her hand, she passed into another apartment.

"What impertinence! what unheard-of impertinence!" exclaimed Mrs. Duncan, as with flashing eyes, she returned from the verandah. "Where is this to end?—what on earth will she take upon herself to do next?"

"Hu—sh!" interposed the buff lady, in a prolonged whisper, "she has ears on every side of her. But it is perfectly unbearable —I am very glad that Laura Snaffles wrote to her as she did."

"But won't she catch it when her husband hears of it," said another. "You know he wants to get the adjutancy as soon as Mr. Smiles is promoted, and he won't have a chance of it if the 'old cat' puts a spoke in his wheel."

"They'll be gone by that time."

"Yes! but Snaffles will require creden-

tials from the Colonel—I wouldn't be Laura for anything."

"But she has done quite right. Fancy, the impudence of Mrs. D. sending her old dress to poor Mrs. Simpson, and when they are so badly off, too. It was a double insult—I hope Captain Simpson won't make her put it on—I would go in rags myself first."

"So would I! She grows more presuming every day—impertinence is no name for it."

"Of whom are you speaking, Mrs. Duncan?" demanded the voice of their "commanding officer," blandly, "who is it that is so impertinent?"

She was standing in the midst of them again, and the wives of the 99th coloured, looked guilty, and popping Truth into their pockets, pulled out Policy, and circulated him freely.

"Oh!—that young fellow who was here the other day," replied Mrs. Duncan, in some confusion, "Captain—what was his

name—the Governor's *aide-de-camp*, I mean—Captain Gordon Romilly!"

The words fell on the listening ears of Véronique so unexpectedly that she started, and nearly dropped the cup and saucer with which she was engaged.

The ladies had apparently forgotten her presence until then, or fancied she was not sufficiently familiar with the language to understand what they were saying, but now their attention was directed towards her, and Mrs. Dowdson desired her to call the "boy" to remove the tea-tray from the drawing-room.

She executed the commission as quickly as she could, and when she returned and took up her station beside the sofa of her mistress, she found that the beloved name was still the topic of their conversation.

"A very amiable young man," remarked Mrs. Dowdson, who had nevertheless reviled Gordon Romilly roundly whilst in Madras for avoiding an introduction to her; "others may have found him impertinent, but *I* never did so," which was true in so

far that she had never had the opportunity of finding him anything at all.

"It was the general opinion," said Mrs. Duncan in self-defence, for which Véronique immediately hated her, "but doubtless he behaved differently to different people. Do you know whether he is likely to return to the appointment?"

"No! he has resigned it, and Sir James Greenfield's son is to take his place. I suppose you know that his father died before he reached England?"

Véronique's heart beat so rapidly, that she could hardly listen.

"No! I was not sufficiently interested in Captain Romilly to make any enquiries on the subject. His father was some Lord or other, was he not?"

"Lord Erskine Romilly!" said her hostess, in a tone of correction, "the Bournemouth family—one of the best in England. The Colonel is well acquainted with some of their most intimate friends."

"Oh! then I suppose you will see Cap-

tain Romilly in England!" said Mrs. Duncan indifferently.

"Not the slightest doubt of it," replied Mrs. Dowdson, with such certainty that Véronique's heart throbbed for joy, although there was not the least chance in the world of its hopes being fulfilled after that fashion.

But the hour was growing late, and one after another, with few exceptions, the married men called in from the mess-table to release their weary wives from social purgatory, and to take them home.

"Laura not here?" said the cheerful voice of Mr. Snaffles, as he walked into the drawing-room and saluted Mrs. Dowdson. "Why! what can be the matter with the old lady? I am sure she meant to come."

"She may have told *you* so, Captain Snaffles," replied the Colonel's wife, (Mrs. Dowdson always made a point, when addressing the subaltern officers, of giving them brevet-rank; it reminded them so powerfully of the blessings which *ought* to have been theirs, and rubbed their hair, up

the wrong way, so sweetly,) "but Mrs. Snaffles was kind enough to send me a note to explain her absence, which set all *my* doubts on the subject at rest."

"By Jove! I hope she hasn't been rude to you!" exclaimed the startled lieutenant, who had already entertained serious misgivings as to how his Laura, and the 'old cat,' would hit it off together, after the lecture which the former had received. "She's rather hasty, you know, and very apt to say just what she thinks, but Laura would be very sorry to be rude to you, or that you should think her so."

"Well! perhaps you and I may not agree upon what constitutes rudeness, Captain Snaffles," replied Mrs. Colonel Dowdson, as, blandly smiling, she handed him his wife's note, "but here is Mrs. Snaffles, letter, which you can read at your leisure, and let me hear your opinion of it to-morrow morning, or any other time. Good-night!"

And grasping the "chit" in his hand, with a muttered imprecation on the folly

of all womankind, Mr. Snaffles returned the lady's greeting, and dashed out into the "compound," fully resolved to go home at once, and give Mrs. Laura such a talking to, as she should not cease to remember for the next twelve months.

Meanwhile, the rest of the visitors having departed, Mrs. Colonel Dowdson gave her lady's maid permission to retire to her bedroom, which Véronique had no sooner gained, than she flung herself prostrate before the Throne of Heaven, to return thanks for having been miraculously guided to take service in a family with whom her Gor-don had been so intimate, and in the bosom of which, it was next to impossible she should not encounter him again.

CHAPTER X.

BY LONG SEA.

THE week which elapsed before the "Earl of Hardbake" was ready for sailing, was necessarily a busy one. Colonel Dowdson was fully occupied in looking after the sale of his own effects, and the embarkation of the troops of which he was going home in charge; and his wife had to superintend the furnishing of the stern-cabin, which had been reserved for their use; and the proper disposition of her personal property.

What with setting the last stitches to her mistress's sea wardrobe, and packing the wardrobe when completed into a dozen or more large travelling cases, Véronique also found that she had plenty to do, for

the lady, whose servant she now was, had the happy faculty of putting an immense deal of work upon her fellow-creatures in the most blandly affable manner possible. But the girl did not mind it, she loved to be so employed, for with every successive trunk that she strapped down, she felt herself drawing nearer that centre towards which all the hopes of her life converged.

Expectation was strong within her; so strong as almost to over-balance the weight of suspense under which she still laboured, and as the hours of waiting were, one by one, numbered with the past, Véronique had but a single regret, that she had not seen her adopted brother again.

Each day, since David had left her at Colonel Dowdson's door, had she watched for his promised coming, and each day, had been disappointed, although she had been afraid even, when given permission to amuse herself, to leave the "compound" of the house, for fear that he should call to see her in her absence. She could not account for David thus failing in his

promise not to leave the place until he should have bidden her adieu ; and in her heart she called him hard names for so deserting her, but the last evening arrived, and still she had not seen him ; and at six o'clock the next morning, she was put into a "masoolah" boat, with her mistress and her mistress's guard of honour, and had no time thenceforth to think of anything but the bustling scene about her, and her own very uneasy sensations on a first introduction to the surf of Madras.

Mrs. Colonel Dowdson ought by rights to have been on board the night before, or at all events at four o'clock in the morning, but she knew that however irate at the delay, it was not likely that the Captain of the "Earl of Hardbake" would presume to sail without the wife of the officer in charge of the troops he was carrying, and to make her appearance when everybody else had been ready for a couple of hours past, and rolling about in the roads to no purpose for the same length of time, was attended with a certain degree of conse-

quence in her short-sighted eyes, and looked as though the "Earl of Hardbake" were making the passage home solely on her account; or at all events as if she were, (what Mrs. Dowdson firmly believed she was,) the most important personage on board of her.

Véronique,—too sad now that she was really about to quit the land which had been home to her, and too frightened and uneasy by the noise made by the "masoolah" boatmen, and the uncomfortable see-saw motion of their craft, to notice anything or body, but herself,—missed seeing the little farce which was being enacted by the female commanding officer of the 99th, as she gave herself airs for the last time amongst the gentlemen of that regiment, several of whom accompanied her and the Colonel on board.

Mrs. Dowdson was in high spirits as the "masoolah" boat danced over the surf with her, for the bachelors of the 99th, the difficulty of securing whose intimate attendance at her house had ever been a sore

point, had come to the scratch boldly during the previous week, making their appearance in clusters at all hours of the day; and here were actually seven of the youngest and best-looking amongst them, who had all insisted upon having the honour of conveying her on board. As they laughed and jested with Mrs. Dowdson, one arming himself with her shawl, another with her waterproof, and a third with her travelling-bag, and all seven stealing occasional furtive glances at the sweet pensive face of the girl who sat so quietly in the corner of the boat, straining her sad eyes for a last look at the flat and fiery shores of Madras, the Colonel's wife felt like a queen, like Cleopatra being borne in triumph to her gilded barge; and as, still attended by her numerous *aides-de-camp*, she climbed the ship ladder, at the head of which appeared the captain ready to receive her, her affability was beyond all compare. Her exclamation of amiable horror at the small dimensions of the fine cabin to which Captain Hollyoak introduced her, mixed with girlish

tittering at the idea of being obliged to live in it, was perfectly characteristic of Mrs. Dowdson, as well as the professedly forced amiability with which, in order to soothe the skipper's feelings, she finally decided that it would do "very well indeed," and they must all "expect to put up with a little inconvenience when so great an end was to be attained."

However, Captain Holyoak had waited on the lady's pleasure long enough already, and gave her no opportunity of exhibiting her consequence by showing off the docility of her *aides-de-camp* before the passengers of the "Earl of Hardbake," for, having shown her to her cabin, he rushed on deck again, cleared the ship hastily of all strangers, and before Mrs. Colonel Dowdson remade her appearance, the anchor had been weighed, and the vessel's head set in a direct course for home, whilst the seven bachelors tossing back to the strand of Madras, were congratulating each other on having got rid of their "old fool" of a Colonel and his "old cat" of a wife, and

wondering "who the deuce that pretty girl could be whom she was taking to England with her."

Under that class of circumstances which can be better imagined than described, certainly come the first few days spent on board a vessel, be she sailer or steamer. With Véronique, fear at finding herself upon the element which she had always so much dreaded, and a pause in the excitement which had hitherto sustained her, combined with real physical weakness to render her very ill indeed; and for several days she lay in her berth quite incapable of moving or exerting herself; during which time Mrs. Colonel Dowdson, who had been remarkably free from seasickness, made much at the cuddy table out of the necessity of having a soldier's wife to assist her in her dressing operations, and feared that, having been used to the services of a French woman, she must at times considerably startle the poor creature by addressing her in a language which she could not understand.

At last, however, the French lady's-maid, by dint of the unremitting exertions of an admiring young doctor, added to the compulsion which, when occasion called for it, Véronique knew well how to put upon herself, crawled out of her berth again, and staggered to her feet. She still felt sick and giddy. Directly she opened her eyes and saw the pendulous motion of the swinging tray which hung in the centre of her cabin, and felt the rolling of the planks beneath her feet, all her old sensations returned; but she was determined, if possible, to conquer them, for Mrs. Colonel Dowdson, notwithstanding the benevolence in her servant's cause which she exhibited at the cuddy table, had not failed to enter the cabin once a day, and reprimand Véronique smartly for not making a proper attempt to overcome her malady. She knew too that her mistress must require her services, and that she was doing nothing in return for her passage-money until she rendered them. And pride had some part in forcing Véronique to try to dress herself,

and go on deck. But her fingers trembled so that she could not fasten her clothes, and her eyes were dim and her limbs shook with weakness, and finally, when only half-attired, she dropped down again upon her trunk, and shed tears from sheer inability to prevent their flowing.

As she was thus occupied, a tap sounded on her door. Véronique started: her cabin was situated in the steerage amongst those of the second-class passengers; Mrs. Dowdson never descended to it except once a day, and her visit had been already paid, added to which dinner was at that moment going on in the cuddy, and beside her mistress and the Colonel she knew not a single person upon board. Yet it was with pleasurable anticipation, with a faint hope that some woman had noticed her loneliness and pitied her for it, that Véronique listened to the gentle tap twice repeated, and then asked, "who's there?"

"Steward!" was the answer, in a voice which made Véronique tremble—it sounded so familiar to her. "I have some dinner

for you, Mademoiselle. May I bring it in?"

"David, David!" she screamed, forgetting all her weakness in her pleasure and surprise, and flinging open the cabin-door, in another moment she was hanging round the neck of her adopted brother in a burst of hysterical tears. "Oh, David! how did you come here? what are you doing on board this ship? I thought that you had forgotten me, *mon frère*, that you were angry with your poor Véronique, because you never came to say *adieu* to me. *Ciel! que je suis heureuse de te revoir.*"

She clung to him, burying her fair face upon his breast, and winding her slight arms about him with an energy which was akin to force, whilst he looked down upon her fragility and dependence on him with a proud tenderness, which would have been pathetic to anyone who had known the history of their hearts.

"I did not go to see thee, *chérie!*" he replied, whilst with one hand he fondly stroked her dark head, "because I hoped

that what has come to pass would be, and that no *adieux* between us would be necessary, at any rate for some time further. Had I failed in getting this situation, thou wouldst have seen me, Véronique, and more than once. How could I have let thee go without another word?"

"But what situation, David! what are you?" asked Véronique, smiling through her tears.

"A steward! did I not tell you when you asked who was at the door?"

"A *steward*, to wait at table?" said the girl, in a tone of dismay, "and you, David, who know so much more than I, and—"

"Thou, who art a lady's maid!" he interposed, gaily.

"Yes, but there was a reason, a necessity, for me to enter service, David."

"And there is a reason why I should do so also, Véronique."

She glanced up at him enquiringly.

"To watch over thee, *ma sœur*," he said, in answer to that look, "to see that thou hast justice done to thee, and that on ar-

riving in England thou art not cast off, as many girls in the same situation have been, without a home to go to, or a protector to stand up for thee. *Mon père* left thee in my charge, Véronique, and it shall not be my fault if I do not carry out his wishes."

"And you have done all this for *me?*" exclaimed the girl, wonderingly, "you have left your home, David, and parted with your property, and exiled yourself from your own country, that you may watch over me! Oh! you are too good to me."

"Where thou art is my home, Véronique, I have no other," he answered, quickly, and the look which accompanied his words melted her into fresh tears.

"Oh, David! David! how good you are," she repeated, as she lifted her wet eyes to meet his own.

Her gratitude appeared to disturb him, for he turned away without a reply, and stooped to lift up a tray which he had set down outside the door.

"Now! what have we been about?" he

said, affecting annoyance to conceal his discomposure, "I have let you prattle on so long that your dinner must be cold. Nevertheless you must eat it, Véronique, for I kept it from the cuddy-table for you, and you have fasted quite long enough already."

He arranged the tray upon her travelling box, and made a seat for her of shawls and pillows, and averred that he would not listen to another word until he saw that she had eaten something.

"Oh! I shall get quite well now!" she said, cheerfully, as she permitted him to do just what he chose with her. "I cannot tell you how much better I already feel. But how is it that you did not come to see me before, David. We have been five days at sea, have we not?"

"True! but I heard from others that you were ill, and I feared to find strangers with you in your cabin. But to-day the Colonel's lady remarked at the dinner-table that you had eaten nothing since coming on board, and at that intelligence my heart,

Véronique, would permit me to rest quiet no longer."

"Will madame be angry, think you, David, if I tell her that you are my brother?"

"You must not tell her that, *ma sœur*, or she will disbelieve you," answered the native, with a serious smile, "but let her know the truth, and that she will not find that I take up the time which belongs to herself, for in the first place I shall have too much to do, and in the second, boardship is a public situation, where everything is observed, and I must be careful of your reputation."

"You are always careful of me, David," said Véronique, slipping her hand into one of his.

"Who else have I to be careful for?" he replied as, with a gentle squeeze, he released it, and taking up the tray again, returned to his new and multifarious duties.

When he had disappeared, and Véronique had time to realise that he was to be near her during the voyage home, all that

had vexed and troubled her seemed to have vanished with the comfort of his presence. She did not crave to see him constantly, to know that he was close at hand was quite sufficient for her, and from that hour she grew rapidly better, and in another couple of days was as good a sailor as anyone on board.

The passengers by the "Earl of Hardbake" were as heterogeneous a company as such assemblies usually are. First and foremost, of course, came Mrs. Colonel Dowdson, who sailed out of her stern cabin late for breakfast regularly every morning, and sunk into the seat reserved for her next the Captain, with a gracious bow, which included all at table, and gave them a tacit permission to begin. The officer second in command of the troops was a Lieutenant Reed, a light-hearted, merry young fellow, with a girl-wife as cheerful as himself, whose delight it was to draw out Mrs. Dowdson's peculiarities for her own and her husband's benefit, and towards whom, the Colonel's lady, having more than

half a suspicion that she oftener laughed at than sympathized with her, cherished unmistakable enmity. Mrs. Mac Bean, the coarse half-caste wife of a Calcutta shop-keeper, with her olive complexioned daughters, and Mrs. Leighton, a pretty flirting woman who was taking home three little children to place under the care of her mother, were the only other females amongst the first-class passengers, the rest of the cuddy-table being filled with men, chiefly foreigners, who seldom attended to anything during the momentous hour of feeding, except their own wants.

As soon as Véronique reappeared on deck, she found that her mistress kept her fully employed, not so much by reason of work—for of that there was little to do—as of constant attendance on her personal comforts. Mrs. Dowdson could do nothing without her lady's maid: in her cabin, on deck, even at the cuddy table, was Véronique to be seen patiently standing behind the lady's chair, either with a fan or smelling-bottle, or shawl, whilst the eyes of all the Eng-

lishmen present would be fixed upon her attractive features, delighting Mrs. Dowdson by the second-hand importance which the beauty of her maid devolved on herself, and making the black steward throw about the glass and crockery with unnecessary clatter as he saw the undisguised admiration to which Véronique was subjected. For, notwithstanding the rebuffs which she occasionally met with at the hands of Mrs. Reed—notwithstanding that, from her desire to appear perfectly *au fait* at everything which concerned the country to which she was going, and of which she knew so little, she was often betrayed into errors so ludicrous that the mirth of her listeners could not be restrained—still Mrs. Colonel Dowdson was in her glory, although that glory might be a shade paler than it had appeared when she was in the bosom of the 99th.

She was acknowledged to be the biggest person in the circle in which she moved; her cabin was the best in the ship, she had the place of honour at table, and when she

lounged upon deck during the long sultry evenings, with Véronique sitting or standing near her chair, she was always surrounded by the most pleasant men on board. And Mrs. Dowdson, although far be it from her unworthy biographer to assert that she ever entertained the slightest wish or idea of carrying on a flirtation on her own account, being the strictest and most discreet of wives and women, yet liked the *kudos*, whether on board or ashore, of having a bevy of young men gathered about her, and by their demeanour silently admitting the power of her position, whilst younger and handsomer women, dependent on themselves for means of entertainment, might throw soft glances in the same direction in vain.

She had found this attainment a matter of difficulty until she had secured the services of Véronique, but although she well knew why the gentlemen surrounded her now, Mrs. Dowdson enjoyed even the semblance of being attractive, and the duties of her attendant became onerous in

proportion. Véronique did not like the attention she received; she shrank from each look as though it were an insult offered to Gordon Romilly through herself; but if she tried to leave the company, her mistress never failed to call her back again, and the girl was too diffident and shy to speak openly of what, as yet, had been carried on only in secret. But one evening, when the darkness had fallen (for at sea and in those latitudes there is no dusk) and Mrs. Dowdson was busily engaged in talking to the first lieutenant, a young man to whom she was especially gracious, and of whom her lady's maid stood proportionately in dread, Véronique rose quietly to her feet and slipped away, past Mr. and Mrs. Reed, sitting cosily together like true husband and wife, and Mrs. Leighton carrying on an unlawful whispering with the young doctor over the side of the vessel, to where she found David washing up glasses in the steward's pantry, and grumbling because he had not had time to have a single pipe since that morning after breakfast.

"Is it such hard work, *mon frère*," she said affectionately, "that you have undertaken for my sake? And I, too, have had not a moment to myself since I rose, or I should have come in search of you before now. But we shall soon be at the Cape, David, our journey is half way over. How thankful I shall be when it is done."

"I do not know about that, Véronique. If our present is peaceful, it is folly to long to exchange it for a future of uncertainty. Who can tell what is before us?"

She sighed.

"Ah! who, indeed! What do you intend to do when you get to England, David?"

"I have not yet decided. What are your own plans, Véronique?"

He was looking at her so earnestly that she blushed crimson.

"How can I tell?" she answered vaguely, "it is impossible to know. I must wait and see what happens."

"But I thought your object in coming was to get to Rêve to your mother's family,

Véronique! Once in England, why should you delay to do so?"

"Because——I must wait a little and see. I may not get another service just at first; besides, it would be hardly fair, David, would it, to leave Madame directly, whether she wishes it or no?"

"Perhaps not!" he answered with a sigh. "You and I are destined to be separated, *ma sœur*. I see that our paths in life lie in opposite directions. But I shall never be too far off to love and protect thee, Véronique."

"Where wilt thou go, *mon frère?*" she enquired.

"Straight to Rêve, to see the *curé* there, and ask him what opening there is in that country for occupation for a man of my colour. I have sufficient money to take me there, Véronique; and I have a plan also in my head, which I will not disclose to thee until I know whether there is any chance of its fulfilment. Meanwhile, thou wilt know that I am safe at Rêve, and I will write thee such a description of the

birthplace of *notre père*, that thou wilt not rest until thou hast joined me there."

"I shall be glad to think thou art at Rêve," she answered musingly, "Rêve, which I have so often longed to visit, and after a while, David, when I can see my way in life a little clearer, perhaps, I may come to thee."

"*Perhaps!*" echoed the native, "say, certainly, Véronique. Surely thou art not so much in love with bondage as all that."

She shook her head and smiled, although the expression brought to her mind another bondage by which she was sorely fettered.

"If I live, David!" she said earnestly as she placed her hand upon his shoulder, "if I live, I will come to thee and to Rêve."

"Mar-rie! Mar-rie!" sounded in the sharp voice of Mrs. Colonel Dowdson from the upper deck, and Véronique started and prepared to quit the pantry.

"I must go; she never leaves me a minute to myself. David, I wish I might

have a day's holiday with you at the Cape; but I know that it will not be allowed me."

"*N' importe, ma sœur!* Come with me to Rêve, and we will live a life's holiday together, if you but say you wish it to be so."

But to this proposition Véronique had no time to make reply, for as the native spoke, the head of Lieutenant Palmer, the ship's officer, to whom she entertained so great an aversion, was thrust into the pantry, with a request that she would return to the presence of her mistress.

"Why were you so cruel as to leave us, Mademoiselle Mary?" he said with most unpleasant familiarity, as Véronique walked back to the poop, by his side. "You know that I can't talk or make myself agreeable in any way, unless your eyes are beaming on me to brighten up my intellect. The old lady has found me most uncommonly stupid for the last half hour, I can tell you, and I think she has sense enough to dis-

cover the cause, for she said I was perfectly unbearable and sent me off in search of you, Mademoiselle Mary, in hopes, I suppose, that I should bring back my wits at the same time."

But Véronique, unable through annoyance which was half fear, to reprove him for speaking to her in such a strain, pushed forward silently but glowing with indignation, to the protection of Mrs. Colonel Dowdson's chair, and was thankful to receive even the rebuke with which she was welcomed for having presumed to quit it.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LIEUTENANT'S STORY.

"Now, Mr. Palmer!" exclaimed Mrs. Dowdson, as soon as her reproof was over, and the party had once more settled themselves on deck, "we are quite ready for your account of the faithless widow, so pray, begin! Mar-rie, child, what are you seating yourself out there for? Come nearer, and sit down on the hen-coop, next to me. Mr. Palmer is going to tell us a most entertaining story, and I have no wish to interrupt him during its relation, by requests for my wrappers or *eau-de-cologne*."

Véronique obeyed, although the darkness in which the deck was enveloped, and the contiguity of her position to that of the

gentleman in question, made her do so tremblingly, and Lieutenant Palmer, who was an ugly, red headed fellow, but like many other ugly people, uncommonly amusing when he chose to be so, assured his patroness that she must not raise her expectations too high, for the story was a very ordinary one indeed, the only merit of which lay in its undeniable truth.

"If I chose to romance upon the subject," he said, "I daresay I might make rather a good thing out of it, but invention, unfortunately, is not my *forte*, therefore I am compelled to adhere to the bare facts. This failing of mine has but one advantage that I know of, whatever I say may be implicitly believed," and as Mr. Palmer uttered these words, Véronique knew by the sound of his voice that he had turned his head towards her, although the gloom was so great that it was impossible to read the expression of his features.

"Well, now that we understand that," replied the Colonel's wife, with an assumption of juvenility, "we are quite prepared

to place credence in everything that you tell us, so there can be no reason why you should not proceed."

"Your wishes, Madam, are law," said Mr. Palmer, bowing from the hen-coop, which ran like a bench round three sides of the upper deck, "therefore I will commence without further delay. It was just about this time, four years ago, that amongst other passengers, we shipped Major Waddell, of the retired list of Bombay, bound for the Cape of Good Hope, where it was his intention to pass the remainder of his days. Now, ladies and gentlemen," continued the Lieutenant, for quite a little group had gathered round Mrs. Dowdson's chair of state to listen to the story, "you must understand that Major Waddell was a marrying man, or rather, I should say, a man on the look-out for a wife."

"What's the difference?" asked a voice, from the outside of the circle.

"A very great one, sir!" replied Mr. Palmer, "for I presume, from your putting the question, that you are a gentleman; the

ladies are better informed on these vital matters ; eh, Mrs. Dowdson ? A marrying man is a man who will marry if opportunity and fortune favour him : but a man on the look-out for a wife, is a man who will marry the first woman who falls in his way. That's the difference, Mr. Great Unknown, and a vast difference it makes to the individual on occasions. Have I explained myself to the general satisfaction ?"

"Perfectly, perfectly, go on !" arose in a chorus of entreaty, from all but the girl who sat by the Lieutenant's side, and dreaded, she hardly knew what, every time he turned towards her.

"Well, then, Major Waddell at fifty years of age, with the handsome pension awarded him by the Bombay Army (I think it is about a hundred pounds per annum), a head as smooth as a billiard ball from the united effects of age and climate, and a complexion which made him seem as though he were always in a passion, was on the look-out for a wife, and he had not been twenty-four hours on board before he had

made his wishes and intentions patent to all the lady passengers. He described the beauties of the Cape of Good Hope, and the delights of a permanent residence there, until their mouths must have watered to make their future home in such a paradise. He had one box after another taken up from the hold, and displayed their contents for the admiration of his fair listeners, showing bale after bale of glistening Chinese silks, delicate Shanghai gauzes, embroidered India muslins and Delhi shawls, whilst he assured them that they had not seen one half of the treasures which he had collected for the happy woman who should become his spouse, and that the fans, card cases, stuffed birds, and Bombay inlaid work, which were stowed away down below, would be sufficient to stock a good sized curiosity shop. But unfortunately, although all our lady passengers gaped at his information, and would have been happy to accept his presents, not one was in a position to offer herself in honourable exchange for them. We had

plenty of wives and old women on board, but the Major, notwithstanding his years, his bald head, and his complexion, had no idea of selling his collection of curiosities, himself included, under a *fair* price, and after having relieved his mind by making his wishes known, he locked up his treasures again, ordered the boxes back to the hold, and took no further notice of the ladies than politeness required of him, and we all said that he would have to wait till he got to his destination to commence his wooing. However we were mistaken—"

"I know!" interrupted Mr. Reed, "he bolted with one of the wives: some women would sell their souls for a hold full of dresses," at which Mrs. Reed laughed profanely.

"No, Sir! he did no such thing," replied the Lieutenant, "I beg leave to observe that this is a strictly moral story, and that if it had not been so, I should never have ventured to repeat it before the present august company."

"I stand corrected," said Mr. Reed,

with mock humility, "I thought it would have been the natural sequence for old Waddell," at which Mrs. Dowdson bridled in the dark, and considered that it was time he were reminded of her presence.

"Captain Reed, pray, remember where you are!"

"He's not a captain, Mrs. Dowdson!" quickly interposed his young wife, "he's only a bread and cheese lieutenant, and I can't bear to hear him called anything else. I wish you wouldn't do it."

"And pray what would be your objection to see Mr. Reed a captain?" demanded the Colonel's lady, in a tone of awful propriety, but her antagonist was not to be easily daunted.

"Oh! because, in this horrid India, where promotion is so slow, of course, the higher their rank the older they are, and I know that every step my husband gains in the army, will be the key-note for something lost from his capability of enjoyment. I like him best as he is, thank you, Mrs. Dowdson, and do not look forward with

any pleasureable anticipation to exchanging my lieutenant for a toothless old general."

At this piece of flat heresy against her favourite idol, military rank, Mrs. Colonel Dowdson, with the serenest pleasure, could have boxed the speaker's ears. But, as the rules of society do not admit of such indulgences, and she had no repartee at hand wherewith to crush her adversary, she turned off the remark with lofty displeasure, merely observing in a tone of coldness—

"If you have nothing more to say, Mrs. Reed, we will request Mr. Palmer to go on with his narrative."

"Oh, no! I've quite done, thank you!" was the saucy answer, for which Mr. Reed gave his wife a warning pinch, and she evinced her docility at her husband's correction by pulling his long moustaches for him.

"When I told you, ladies," continued the Lieutenant, "that Major Waddell's head was as smooth as an egg, I did not wish you by any means to infer that he always exhibited it in that condition. On

the contrary, he had had two splendid wigs sent out to him, straight from Truefitt's, and nothing offended him more than to receive a hint, even from his male acquaintance, that he did not wear his own hair. Well, the days went on, until we sighted the Mauritius, into which place the Captain had had no intention of putting when we started, but finding that, owing to some mistake at Madras, we were likely to run short of vegetables and other sundries, he determined to stay there for twelve hours on his way, and we had scarcely dropped anchor before we received a message, to know if we could take home another first-class passenger, as there was a lady desirous of proceeding to England by the earliest opportunity. We had plenty of room for her, and sent her word to that effect, and the same evening, just before we sailed, she came on board with all her traps. I've seen ladies climb up our gangway before who brought plenty of baggage with them, but in all my experience I never saw such a quantity of luggage as that

lady had, and the queerest-shaped boxes and bundles I think I ever clapped eyes on. I was leaning over the side at the time, counting the packages as they were handed up, and if I remember rightly there were over thirty of them, amongst which was a huge barrel of spirits, or liquid of some sort, which struck us as a strange thing for a woman to carry about with her, however, it was no business of ours: she was a widow, taking home a good many of her late husband's possessions, and down they all went into the hold together, and we thought no more about them. When the lady first came on board she was so wrapt up in black veils and shawls that we were quite unable to form any correct estimate of her form or features. But after a few days spent in the seclusion of her cabin, she made her appearance at the cuddy-table, and we then saw that she was a very nice-looking woman, of not more than thirty years of age, with a most seductive pair of dark eyes, of which one might imagine that in happier days, and when beaming on the

dear departed, she had known how to make good use.

"Wrapped in grief, as of course she was, for her husband had only been dead for a few weeks, we vied with one another to draw the fair widow out from her deep melancholy, and to induce her to join the innocent amusements in which we indulged ourselves—and of all of us, it was observable that Major Waddell had the most success. The lady might listen courteously to our anecdotes, but she positively smiled at those of the facetious Major. She thanked us for our sympathy with a sigh, but she turned the full light of her dark eyes on him, until he was positively dazzled by their beams.

"Every evening might he now be seen in attendance on her, carrying her shawl, her chair, and her novel to the upper deck; and when it was too dark for her to read, beguiling the time until her bed hour with descriptions of all the delights of the Cape of Good Hope, and the wonders that he had down in the hold.

"He quite took the trouble of the widow off the hands of the rest of the passengers, and we were delighted that he should have discovered suitable employment for himself, and that every one appeared so satisfied with the arrangement. The lady's tears became less and less frequent; she unrolled herself further every day from the reserve with which she had been at first enveloped, and had it not been for one little peculiarity (which she shared in common with most of her delightful sex), would have been as little troublesome a passenger as we had on board. But she could not rest easy respecting her possessions in the hold. She was always being quite sure that they were either lost, or injured, or the sea water had got into them; and if our men made a journey once down below, between the Mauritius and the Cape, for her satisfaction, they must have made it twenty times!"

"Now, Mr. Palmer!" cried Mrs. Dowdson, "I am sure that is a hint for me, because I had fears for my travelling chest of

drawers last week. How very ungallant of you!"

"A thousand pardons!" exclaimed the Lieutenant, placing his hand upon his heart; "but upon my honour, Mrs. Dowdson, it is so much pleasure to do anything for you, that I had entirely forgotten the circumstance to which you allude. How can you think for a moment it could be otherwise? If you wanted to see all your boxes every hour of the day, I would carry them up and down on my own back, sooner than you should be disappointed! What do I live for, if it is not to please the fair sex?" and as Lieutenant Palmer uttered this charming sentiment, he edged himself so close to Véronique that their shoulders touched.

"Come, come! no more nonsense!" cried Mrs. Dowdson, who was delighted with the compliment implied, and then perceiving a sudden movement on the part of her lady's-maid, she added—"Mar-rie! child! what are you fidgeting about in that manner for! keep still, I beg — you

shake the back of my chair each time you move!"

"Madame, do you require my services? may I go down below?" pleaded Véronique in a voice of entreaty.

"No, no! stay where you are; I shall be going down myself in another minute —as soon, that is to say, as Mr. Palmer's delightful story is concluded. But I am dying to hear what became of the widow and Major Waddell."

"Well, Madam, what became of them was pretty much the same as what becomes of every unhappy creature of my sex when placed in hourly juxta-position with one of yours. The Major was no more adamant than the rest of us; indeed, I think I mentioned at the beginning of my narrative that he was rather less so. Any way the end of it was, what every one had foreseen from the beginning, that he lost his heart.

"But although he got the pretty widow to acknowledge, amidst such blushes as only widows blush, that if she could ever make up her mind to let another creep into

that bleeding heart, left vacant by the defunct Diddleton (did I say her name was Diddleton ?), that other should be no other than the seductive Waddell, his victory stayed there ; for at the same time she informed him that her late husband had bound her, by an oath, never to entertain a thought of matrimony again, and showed him a miniature of the now seraphic Diddleton as he had appeared when in the flesh, with a savage frown upon his features, as though ready to execute vengeance upon her if she failed to keep her promise to him.

"But the gallant Major was in no wise daunted ; he related every particular of his wooing to me in the confidence of the smoking hour, and affirmed that he should persevere until he had ground the widow's scruples to the dust.

"'A fine woman, sir !' he would exclaim to me, 'a deuced fine woman' (I beg your pardon, Mrs. Dowdson—I am only repeating the Major's words, remember !)"

"Granted," replied the Colonel's lady,

par parenthèse, with a gracious inclination of the head.

"'A deuced fine woman, and with no nonsense about her. I like a widow, sir—I'd rather have a widow for my wife (as long as she's not too old), than half a dozen of your trumpery misses, who lose their tongues directly a man looks them in the face.'"

"Oh dear! Mr. Palmer! I'm afraid your Major Waddell must have been a very shocking man," interposed Mrs. Dowdson at this juncture.

"Not at all, Madam, I assure you: his sentiments were as correct as his behaviour. But to proceed. He told me that he was determined to persevere until he conquered, and he kept his word, although it was not an easy victory. The widow held out for exactly two weeks and three days—rather a trial for a lover's patience, as you will acknowledge, ladies; but the Major stuck to his colours and she surrendered at last, and in proof of it, she delivered up the portrait of her dead Diddleton, which she had hitherto worn next to her faithful heart,

into the safe keeping of his successor, and replaced it with an auburn lock from the Major's last new wig, whilst he, first carefully removing the setting, which was of gold, chucked the painted miniature overboard in my presence, whilst he chuckled over the idea that the remembrance of Diddleton should never bother either of them again, even by means of his pictured image.

"'She is *mine*, sir,' he said proudly on that occasion. 'My Sarah-Maria has succumbed at last to my entreaties, and I will not hear of *Mrs. Waddell* carrying about the image of a dead Diddleton in her bosom. What is Diddleton to either of us, sir? Nothing—nothing! When I have once led Sarah-Maria to the hymeneal altar at Cape Town, I hope never to hear even the sound of his name again!' I thought he was premature, but I made no remark on his proceeding. I daresay if I married a widow myself that I would rather she forgot all about *her* Diddleton as soon as might be. But am I tiring you, ladies? The *dénouement* is close at hand."

"Not at all! not at all! We are very much interested in the Major's love affair."

"Are you tired of me, Mademoiselle Mary?"

This question was put in so low a voice, and during the clamour of the preceding answer, that it was unheard, save by her to whom it was addressed.

"What I am, or am not, sir, is of little importance!"

"Except to *me*," he said hurriedly. "Well, Mrs. Dowdson, the natural sequence to the widow's acceptance of the Major was, that all his boxes must come up from the hold again, and be opened on deck for her especial gratification, and when she saw all the treasures of many years' collection, which were laid at her feet by the enamoured Waddell, I think she thought she had made a very good exchange for her defunct Diddleton. But there was one case which had not made its appearance with the others, one box of shawls and dresses which the Major had particularly wished to show her, and the men

had been employed so long hauling up and down these heavy packages, that at last the Captain turned a little bit rusty, and refused to have anything more brought up that day. Now, as you are all aware, there is but one day a week on which passengers are allowed to have their luggage from the hold, and Major Waddell was told that he must wait until the next opportunity before he procured the box, the contents of which he so much desired to show Mrs. Diddleton. But, like all lovers, he was impatient, and after having stormed about his box for a long time in vain, he resolved that he would go down into the hold and get it himself.

"'All right!' I said, when he informed me of his intention; 'do what you like, but don't tell me of it;' and consequently I heard no more of the Major and his possessions, until that evening when we were all, except himself, sitting round the cuddy table together.

"It had been a squally day, and when the night fell the air was so cold that the passengers were glad to sit in the cuddy

with closed doors, and occupy themselves with their books, and games of draughts or chess, in preference to being nearly blown away on deck. Mrs. Diddleton was there, and evidently on the look-out for her Major's appearance, from the manner in which she kept turning her eyes to the door through which she expected to see him enter.

"Now, ladies! are the pocket-handkerchiefs ready, for here comes the pathetic ending of my story?

"We were assembled, as I have told you, when a noise was heard from below, which I cannot describe better than as a yell of horror—such a yell as made the Captain and most of the passengers rise to their feet. But before they had had time to make any enquiries on the subject, the noise was repeated, accompanied by a great deal of tumbling about and scuffling, and in another moment the cuddy-door was burst open, and the Major, in shirt and trowsers, the perspiration standing on his face from fright, and—that I should have

to relate it!—without any wig upon his head, rushed into the midst of us, panting, breathless, and quite unable to articulate from emotion.

"'Good Heavens! Major! what is the matter?' enquired the Captain, as he looked with astonishment on the state of his passenger, who was covered with dust and cobwebs; 'where have you been? what have you been doing?'

"'He is there! he is there!' exclaimed the Major, pointing, in a vague manner, on all sides of him; 'he has risen, he has come after us—Sarah Maria! save me, save me!' and he shook with terror and excitement.

"I had forgotten all about the hold, and the Major's desire to procure his box, and I must confess that my first impression was that he had been taking a little drop of something to keep out the cold, and love and liquor combined had driven away his moderate stock of senses; but directly I said some words to him to that effect, I saw I was mistaken. It was real fright

that was oppressing him, and when I found that there were three men waiting outside the cuddy door, much in the same condition, I called on a brother officer to accompany me at once to inspect the cause of their alarm.

"'It's there! it's in the hold!' panted Major Waddell, 'don't touch it! don't go near it! Oh, Sarah Maria! that I should have gone through such a scene as this for *your* sake!' and turning for comfort to his lady-love, the poor Major was woefully surprised to find that the widow, instead of flying into his arms, had risen from her seat, and was regarding him with a look of unmistakable aversion.

"'Good gracious, Major,' she exclaimed, '*where is your hair?*' and conscious for the first time, that he had dropped his wig in his alarm and hurry, the hapless lover clapped his hand to his bald pate, and with a groan of dismay, rushed to hide himself in his own cabin."

"But what was it, Mr. Palmer, that had

frightened him so—was there anything in the hold? do tell us."

"There was more than you would think for, ladies, and more than I ever wish to see again. Notwithstanding the protestations of the men who conjured us not to enter the hold till daylight, several of us at once took lanterns, and proceeded to inspect it, and as soon as we had pushed our way amongst the baggage with which it was encumbered, a most horrible sight presented itself to us. The cask of spirits which the widow had brought on board with her, being very bulky, had been stowed away on one end, in a corner, and where it stood, we now saw the figure of a man—or rather, I should say, a figure like nothing human—which, as we advanced towards it, slowly bobbed up and down before us, as though bowing in mock welcome!"

"Good heavens! Mr. Palmer, what was it?" exclaimed half-a-dozen voices, breathless with interest.

"I really hardly like to tell you, ladies, but remember that my tale is true. It

was a corpse—the corpse of the defunct Diddleton, (I really shouldn't laugh), which his disconsolate widow, wishing to convey to England, to be laid in the sepulchre of his fathers, had caused to be enclosed in a cask of spirits, that she might by that means the better carry out her pious intention."

"But why didn't Diddleton remain where he was put?" demanded Mr. Reed.

"Well! either the spirit was not good, or there was not sufficient of it, or, what sounds the most dreadful of all, Jack had smelt a rat, and helped himself on the sly, but the natural consequence of either alternative was that the body of Mr. Diddleton asserted its very unpleasant rights, and refusing to remain any longer in durance vile, stove out the head of the cask, and bobbing up and down by lantern light, in the small quantity of liquor which remained, looked anything but a pleasant customer for the man to encounter, who had just stepped into his widow's affections, and sacrilegiously thrown his miniature overboard!"

"Oh dear! oh dear! what a dreadful story! What did the Major do, Mr. Palmer?"

"Do! Madam? There was nothing left for him to do, for the widow was so disgusted at finding he wore a wig, that she refused to have anything more to say to him from that day forward—though she made him pay right handsomely for the miniature he had destroyed. So we landed him at the Cape, with all his boxes and baggage, a wiser and a sadder man, and I have never heard since whether he has yet found a lady to his taste, or forgotten his brief engagement to the fair Sarah Maria!"

"But the dreadful Diddleton!"

"Oh! the dreadful Diddleton was consigned to the waves the day afterwards. His widow had a fit of hysterics when she was told of the necessity of the proceeding, but the Captain was firm, and indeed it might have caused a mutiny amongst the men had he not been so; for there is nothing which a sailor considers more unlucky than to carry a corpse on board; we

always get rid of them as soon as possible. And now, ladies, that is the end of Major Waddell's wooing: if you can discover a moral to it, you are very welcome to keep it for yourselves, but I have only related it for your amusement, and if I have in any degree succeeded in my object, I shall be well repaid."

They were just about to thank him for the trouble he had taken, and to express their different opinions on the narrative, when a sudden exclamation from Mrs. Dowdson's lady's maid caused them all to look in her direction.

"*Laissez-moi! vous ne devez pas faire cela!*" came in agitated tones from Véronique, as she quickly left her position on the hen-coop, and then addressing herself to her mistress, she hurriedly added, "*Pardon, Madame! il faut que je m'en aille, je ne puis tarder plus longtemps,*" and without waiting for an answer, ran down the companion ladder which led to the lower deck.

This sudden departure threw the whole circle into a state of surprise. The few

words which Véronique had spoken in her own language had been too rapidly enunciated to be intelligible to any of her hearers, and although the Reeds, perceiving that Mr. Palmer's manner had become unaccountably confused, suspected that his behaviour had had something to do with the girl's flight, Mrs. Colonel Dowdson had not an idea of the truth.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed, "the child must be ill."

She could not imagine that any dependent in her service would presume to quit her presence without permission, unless dictated to by some such urgent reason, and as it was already past her own bed-time, and she was very tired, she made a virtue of necessity, and averred her intention of going down at once, to look after "poor Mar-rie."

"That is," concluded Mrs. Colonel Dowdson, with a winning smile, "if Mr. Palmer will have the great goodness to see me safely down the companion-ladder?"

Upon which the Lieutenant, although not

without a degree of trepidation, conducted the lady below, and with an awkward bow, left her at the door of her own cabin.

Mrs. Dowdson expected to find her lady's maid there, for it was part of her duty, if she descended before her mistress, to await her coming in her own apartment, but she was scarcely prepared to see her cast on her knees by the bedside, and with her face buried in her hands, sobbing vehemently from mingled shame and anger.

"Why! Mar-rie, are you in pain; have you hurt yourself?" she demanded, in astonishment, "what is the reason of this extraordinary conduct?"

"*Il ne doit pas agir ainsi,*" exclaimed Véronique, indignantly, as for a moment she raised her crimsoned face to meet Mrs. Dowdson's look of amazement, "*c'est une infamie, je parlerai à Monsieur le Capitaine, je ne veux pas être insultée.*"

Her words were as Greek in the ears of her listener, but the lady comprehended that her servant was neither sick nor sorry, and to subject her to the exhibition of any

other emotion was what she considered a great piece of impertinence on a menial's part. So that her answer was delivered rather stiffly, and Véronique saw at once that she had offended her.

"Whilst you talk such absurd gibberish," said Mrs. Colonel Dowdson, loftily, "it is quite impossible that I, or anyone indeed, should understand you. Get up directly, Mar-rie, and let me know the meaning of this behaviour on your part, or I shall be seriously angry with you."

Véronique remembered herself, and drying her eyes, rose to her feet. Her feelings had been so outraged, that she had totally forgotten that she was only a servant, and now that the recollection poured back upon her, she felt she owed her mistress an apology.

"I beg your pardon, Madame, indeed I do; but for the moment I could think only of myself. He insulted me, Madame, *il s'est moqué de moi*, that man beside whom I was seated, and I cannot bear it. I will not bear it from any one, it is a cruel shame,

une indignité; he would not have dared to do it had I not been friendless and alone."

"*That man!*" re-echoed Mrs. Colonel Dowdson, "of *whom* are you speaking? what *man* sat next to you, Mar-rie?"

"That lieutenant, Madame, that Monsieur Palmer! In the dark he put his arm about my waist, and his face close to mine, and it is not the first time, and I will not stand it. He should be punished for such *grossiéreté,*" and Véronique's usually quiet eyes flashed fire, and her nostrils dilated, and her breast heaved beneath the remembrance of the indignity to which she had been subjected.

Mrs. Colonel Dowdson stood confounded. What was the world coming to, when servants mentioned a gentleman as a "man," and spoke of the notice bestowed on them as an insult instead of considering it an honour?

At first she was going to address her maid to this effect, but something in Véronique's demeanour ever warned her not to

go too far with her, and her mistress feared if she did not take up her cause in this matter, she would procure the agency of some one else. At the same time, she had no wish to have a noise made about it, and to be obliged to express open disapprobation of the Lieutenant's conduct, and therefore she affected to treat the whole concern as a matter of little consequence, and one in which the girl was just as likely to be mistaken as not.

"Dear me! did he, really? You don't mean to say so? But perhaps you were mistaken, Mar-rie, we were all sitting very close together, remember, and Mr. Palmer, in moving, may have had no intention of giving you offence."

"Mistaken, Madame!" exclaimed the girl, scornfully, "when his cheek touched mine. It was no mistake, I can assure you, it was a gross insult!"

"Tut, tut! a gentleman can never have intended to offer you that! He was just playing with you, child; sailors think nothing of a bit of fun."

"But I am not a sailor, Madame," said Véronique, firmly, "and I cannot go on deck again in the dark and sit near that gentleman. He has touched me before, often—many times—though he has never dared to go so far as he went to-night."

"And does he hurt you by touching you, Mar-rie?" demanded her mistress, with a bland smile.

The girl looked at her in astonishment. Was it possible, she thought, that a lady could approve of such conduct. Women, even when their own feelings are not concerned, are so apt to take up the part of one another against the more amorous sex.

But Mrs. Colonel Dowdson did not approve of it; on the contrary, she was rather piqued at its having taken place, and under other circumstances would have exclaimed loudly against its impropriety. But she did not wish to lose either the services of her maid or her cavalier, and she did not care sufficiently for the welfare of the former to mind what annoyances she was

subjected to in the performance of the duties she undertook for herself.

"What if the gentleman did brush against you, are you any the worse for it?" she asked again.

"He shall not do it!" replied Véronique, angrily, as she thought of him whose right to her had made her sacred in her own eyes.

"Well, well, of course not; but don't be too ready to imagine that people intend to insult you. Mr. Palmer doubtless only wished to help you off the hen-coop, or to show you that he was friendlily disposed. Some girls would consider such an attention on a gentleman's part a mark of great honour, and really, considering how you go on with that black man, calling him your brother, and shaking his hand, I don't think you need be so very particular. So, dry your eyes, Mar-rie, pray, and undress me, and let me hear no more of such nonsense."

Véronique did as her mistress required of her, trembling the while with suppressed resentment, and having performed the office

of seeing Mrs. Dowdson safely into bed, rushed away to her own cabin to give fresh vent to her indignation. As she did so, she felt so completely, so entirely alone. It was a case which she shrunk from carrying to her adopted brother's ears, the passages in their past life rendering all such subjects sealed books between them, and she saw that she must expect no spirit of co-operation from her mistress.

Yet Véronique felt strong to act by herself, her love for Gordon Romilly was a breast-plate for her against the advances of the world, and though she wept to think that she should be separated from him, and for want of his protection, subjected to misunderstanding and affront, she never once blamed him for deserting her, but sunk to sleep, believing him in her heart to be all that was most faithful and tender and true.

CHAPTER XII.

NO. 10, LITTLE FITZ-CAVENDISH STREET.

THE rest of the voyage performed by the "Earl of Hardbake," passed without further adventure, so far as the heroine of this story is concerned. Mr. Palmer, deterred, perhaps, by the frigidity of her manner towards him, did not venture to repeat his rudeness. Mrs. Colonel Dowdson continued to treat her with the same mixture of familiarity and snappish authority which she had maintained from the commencement of their agreement, and David, from his post of observation in the steward's pantry, watched over her bodily and mentally, with such tender care and solicitude, that his kindness and the thought

that it would never be in her power to repay it to him, often brought tears into Véronique's eyes. They put in for a few days at the Cape of Good Hope, after which break the last half of the voyage passed, as is usual in such cases, much more quickly than the first had done, and on a bitterly cold day in February the "Earl of Hardbake" sighted Lizard's Point, and commenced to run up the English Channel, a feat which, on account of the setting-in of contrary winds, she did not accomplish under little less than a week, during which time her unhappy passengers, without fires, and many of them provided with very inadequate clothing, were nearly frozen. Véronique, accustomed from childhood to the bleak air of the Neilgherry Hills, did not feel the change so much as some of her companions, and as each day brought them nearer to the white cliffs which she ardently desired to see, and to the accomplishment of that hope which she firmly believed would be fulfilled, her spirits rose to such a height that she was scarcely in a

condition to feel any inconvenience, and bore all her mistress's grumblings and ill-humour with the greatest *sang-froid;* but Mrs. Colonel Dowdson, whose Madras dignity had revolted against the acceptance of any advice on a subject concerning which her desire was to be considered *au fait,* and who had brought nothing warmer with her than what she had worn during the rainy season in India, suffered terribly with the cold. She shivered even in dresses of silk, and mantles which had been thought too heavy to wear in the East, for the circulation of her blood was stagnant from a lengthened residence in hot climates, and she had not had the slightest idea of the intensity of cold which can be conveyed by a February wind in the British Channel. However, there was no help for it then, and although she put on every available wrap which her really handsome wardrobe could produce, Mrs. Colonel Dowdson still sat and shivered in her cabin, her sole amusement finding fault with Véronique, or reviling her unfortunate husband for

having placed her in such a situation, until the happy day arrived when the "Earl of Hardbake" ran into the river, and with fingers without any feeling in them, and a remarkably blue nose, she was lowered, together with her belongings, into a boat at Gravesend to be conveyed on shore.

Whilst the Colonel, who, leaving the troops under the charge of Lieutenant Reed, was about to take his wife to London, and then return to superintend their disembarkation, was busy with Mr. Palmer in seeing the things disposed in the boat, David drew Véronique aside to interchange a few last words.

"Véronique, I shall not be able to leave the ship for the next three days. Send me a letter to the docks to tell me your address, and I will come and see you before I leave London."

"Yes; do, David! dear David, don't forget! I shall feel so lonely in this strange place without you. I will send the letter without fail to-morrow."

"You do not yet know where you are going to in London?"

"Not yet; but everything is ready for us. A friend of the Colonel's has taken rooms for them, and we shall be settled in them to-night. And I will write to you at once, and watch each day for your appearing. *Adieu! mon frère; je vous remercie mille fois de tous vos soins.*"

"*Adieu, chèrie!*" he echoed sadly as he took her two little hands between his own, and gazed earnestly into the depths of her liquid eyes, "*adieu, petite, que Dieu te garde et te bénisse toujours.*"

There was not time to say another word, for Mrs. Dowdson was calling fretfully from the boat for her lady's maid to join her, and the Colonel, who stood in the greatest awe of his wife's humours, and had a corresponding dislike to see her pretty attendant bullied, was entreating Véronique not to keep her waiting any longer; so putting on one side the proffered assistance of the first lieutenant, the girl gave her hand to the black steward, and step-

ping lightly into the tub, was covered with the ship's flag and lowered over the side of the vessel into the boat, where she was received with sundry reproaches for not having made more haste. Mrs. Colonel Dowdson was working up for a bad temper, her teeth were chattering and her body trembling with the cold, and when she glanced from the dark, sullen-looking water over which she was passing, to the dirty unromantic quay towards which she was being borne, she thought England appeared, without exception, the most detestable country she had ever seen. And when on landing at Gravesend, she was detained, standing about a small unfurnished room at the Custom House, for more than an hour, waiting to have her baggage examined before they were permitted to proceed, the land from which she had been so long an alien that it was a strange land to her, sunk still lower in her estimation. At least a dozen times did she desire her husband in an audible voice to inform the officials who she was, and that he had come

over in command of the troops on board the "Earl of Hardbake," but although her remarks were evidently overheard by those for whom they were intended, they only provoked a smile at her folly and did not have the least effect in making the Custom House servants hasten their operations; so that by the time the Colonel was enabled to put her in the train for Blackwall, Mrs. Dowdson was undeniably what ladies call "put out."

"I should think your brother, or Captain Diver or Kitty might have come to meet us at Gravesend," she said in a tone of offence, as the train commenced to move off with them towards London; "I certainly did not expect to be landed in this country without a soul to welcome me! And I think it is very extraordinary that not one of them should be here."

"But my dear!" pleaded the Colonel, "only remember, it is quite impossible they should have known on what day and hour the 'Earl of Hardbake' would arrive, so I think it is just a little unreasonable to

expect they would have been waiting at Gravesend for us."

"I suppose she was telegraphed from the Downs," said the lady sharply.

"Yes! but they may have thought that the troops would disembark at the docks. However, by the advice of Captain Hollyoak, I sent my brother a telegram from Gravesend, to say we had arrived, and so doubtless we shall see them all, ready to welcome us, at the other end."

Cheered by which prospect Mrs. Dowdson condescended for awhile to abate her ill-humour, and speak of the eager pleasure, which she expected her friends would manifest at meeting her again.

"I think we will drive at once to our rooms, Colonel," she said, "instead of going to an hotel. It will be so much more comfortable, for Kitty Diver is sure to have everything in readiness against our arrival; and then when you have had your dinner, you can return to the ship, if you must return to-day."

"No! no!" replied the Colonel, who

was foolish but good-tempered, "as soon as I have seen you safely deposited in your rooms, my dear, I must go back at once to Gravesend, and be thankful if I can get a few mouthfuls at the station on my way. To find dinner waiting our very uncertain movements, is rather more than we can expect."

"Rather more than we can expect," echoed Mrs. Dowdson, with a toss of the head, "why, Colonel, what are you talking about? Of course, dinner will be prepared for us, and everything else that we can need. Did I not write to Kitty Diver from Madras on the subject, and tell her exactly what we wanted, respecting apartments and all other arrangements? A most explicit letter also, and which it is quite impossible she can have misunderstood. Good Kitty! she is a faithful honest creature, and would go through fire and water to serve me, or mine. I shall be really quite pleased to see her again;" and Mrs. Colonel Dowdson settled herself in a complacent manner in the corner of

the carriage, whilst her husband gazed vacantly out of the window, and Véronique, with her heart burning at the anticipation of what might be before her, dreamed of a future, painted by Hope and Love, and was insensible to all outward things.

"Here we are!" exclaimed the Colonel, as the train ran smoothly into the Blackwall terminus, and Mrs. Dowdson shook out her plumes, put on her blandest smile, and said,

"Now for Kitty Diver, and your brother."

But although the platform was crowded with people, many of whom had come to meet their friends, no familiar faces struck the view of either Colonel or Mrs. Dowdson; and the latter, with her former ill-humour returned in full force, was compelled to accede to her husband's proposal, that they should first go to an hotel, from which he would seek out Miss Diver or his brother, and learn at what address their apartments had been secured for them.

"It is most shameful—most inexcusable

of Kitty Diver," said Mrs. Dowdson angrily, as the cab rattled over the stones with them, towards the hotel recommended by the driver, "and I shall take care to let her know that I think so. Kitty will never be the same to me after this—never! —never!"

"But my dear," interposed the Colonel soothingly, "I daresay it is a mistake. You must make excuses for her—perhaps business or a previous engagement—"

"Colonel! I will not sit still and hear you defend such conduct. No business—no engagement should have been permitted to interfere with what I consider a sacred duty on her part. Look what I did for Kitty Diver in Madras! How often she dined with us, and drove with us, and spent the evening at our house. And do you mean to tell me that anything should have prevented her meeting me at the station? And your brother too, and Captain Diver? Where are they? tell me that! if you please; and then begin to

invent paltry excuses for them, as well as Kitty. I am astonished to hear you."

The Colonel shrugged his shoulders, and was silent.

"Well! have you nothing to say in their behalf?" she continued witheringly. "May they not be occupied with their breakfasts, or gone out for a walk, or got some other pressing business to keep them at home? eh, Colonel."

"My dear! my dear!" exclaimed the unhappy man, looking much as though he would like to make his escape from his wife's tongue by a leap through the cab window, "I do not wish to excuse their absence. I only say we had better wait to condemn it, until we hear by what means it may have been brought about."

"Colonel, I've no patience with you," said the lady, "you always try to creep out of an argument after that fashion. However, *I* shall not be so ready to find excuses for them; and that they will hear before we have been together many minutes."

But at this crisis, the cab having arrived

at the door of the hotel, the conversation was for the time suspended, and as Mrs. Dowdson refused to take either meat or drink, until she knew in what quarter of the town her future residence was located, her husband proceeded at once to his brother's chambers, in order to ascertain the address, whilst she spent the hour of his absence in pacing up and down the apartment to which she had been shown, while she held forth to Véronique in unmitigated terms on the sin of ingratitude, and the duty of respect, particularly to one occupying so high a position as the wife of a "pucka" Colonel in Her Majesty's Madras Native Infantry.

But when the "pucka" Colonel returned to the presence of his lady, it was with rather a rueful face, he felt so unpleasantly certain of the reception he should experience for his news. He had been to the chambers of his brother, but found them barred and closed with an intimation that their owner was out of town, and would not return for several days; upon which

he had driven to the address of Captain Diver whom he had also been unfortunate enough to find from home, but whose sister had given him a card with the street and the number of the lodgings she had taken for them, and a message for his wife, to the effect that, she was glad she had arrived in safety, and that if her brother had made no other engagement for her, she would call and see her in the course of the evening.

"*Kitty Diver sent me that message!*" exclaimed Mrs. Dowdson, quite unable to believe her ears, "Kitty Diver said that 'if she had no other engagement' she would call and see me this evening. It is incredible! Why, Colonel, she must have gone mad!"

"No, no, my dear," replied the Colonel, in the same soothing voice he had employed before, "you must remember that in this bustling city people have more cares and business to occupy them than in a place like Madras. You mustn't be hard on poor Kitty—doubtless she does not wish to pay you the ill-compliment of a hurried visit,

and so will defer it till she has leisure to have a long chat with you!"

"Why didn't she come now?" demanded Mrs. Dowdson, fiercely, "why didn't she return with you, or go on at once, and await me at my rooms?"

The Colonel didn't dare to say that Miss Diver had altogether spoken rather nonchalantly on the subject of his wife and her apartments, so he pulled his moustaches and suggested—

"Perhaps she thought she would be in the way, my dear."

"Fiddlesticks!" rejoined the lady, quickly, and then taking the card from his hand, she continued, "Where are my rooms? Oh, Number 10, Little Fitz-Cavendish Street. Did Kitty Diver say what they were like?"

"Kitty Diver said nothing about them, my dear, excepting that that was the address, and that they had been engaged for us a week ago. I was so anxious to get back to you that I did not stay above a minute at the Divers'. But now, if you

wish to enter them at once, perhaps we had better start, although I advise you to have some luncheon or dinner here, first."

"I shall do no such thing," returned his wife, "It would be no use, for we shall find dinner waiting for us at 10, Fitz-Cavendish Street."

"Kitty Diver did not mention anything about dinner," said the Colonel, dubiously.

"Perhaps not! but of course she has ordered it. She has omitted to show me the respect I required of her, by meeting me at the railway station, but she would hardly presume to go so far as to neglect providing for our personal comforts. Order a cab, directly, if you please, Colonel, I wish to go on at once."

Secretly fearful that his wife's assurance would be disappointed, the Colonel yet knew his duty too well not to do as he was told; and in a few minutes they had left the hotel, and were on their way to No. 10, Little Fitz-Cavendish Street.

The rooms which were to be in readiness for her in London, had been a favourite

theme with Mrs. Colonel Dowdson, on board the "Earl of Hardbake," and she had never been tired, if the other passengers expressed doubts as to their movements or destination on arriving in England, of expatiating on the comfort and convenience and luxury of the apartments, which she had bespoken for herself and the Colonel, at the west end of London.

It would appear from her own description of what she had never seen, that Mrs. Dowdson had expected a palace to be prepared for her for three guineas a week; and Véronique, who had been accessory to most of her mistress's conversations on the subject, had also had her ideas with respect to their future habitation considerably inflated.

It is not surprising, therefore, that when the cab which conveyed them thither, drew up at the unpretentious door of a dingy slice of a house situated in a narrow street abutting on Fitz-Cavendish Square, both Mrs. Colonel Dowdson and her lady's maid should have been hard to convince that the

driver had not made a mistake, and had but to be told of it to rattle them off in another direction.

"*This* cannot be the house!" exclaimed Mrs. Dowdson, quite amused at the imbecility of their conductor.

"I should scarcely think so," said the Colonel, peering upwards at the blackened London windows, through which appeared muslin curtains, yellow with smoke and time.

"Why, who would! it is impossible," replied his wife, snappishly, "tell the man to get up again, and drive on."

"Is this Number 10, Little Fitz-Cavendish Street?" enquired the Colonel, mildly, of the cabman, who had given a vigorous pull at the door bell.

"Can't you read?" was the emphatic answer, as the driver jerked his thumb backwards.

"My dear! I really think it is," suggested the Colonel, timidly, as he glanced in the direction indicated by the cabman's thumb, and saw a large 10 in brass figures on the panel, "I daresay it is a very nice

house inside, and at all events I had better get out and ask."

"*These* the rooms Kitty Diver has taken for *me!*" exclaimed Mrs. Dowdson. "Colonel, it is impossible! the man has made some mistake—tell him to drive on at once."

"But, my dear, here is the servant, so I think it would be wise to enquire first. Pray is this Number 10, Little Fitz-Cavendish Street?"

"Yes, sir," replied the lodging-house Phillis, who had a long streak of smut right across her face.

"Didn't I tell you so?" remarked the driver, with contempt, "perhaps you'll believe me another time, sir!—shall I take down the boxes?"

"Yes, certainly—that is to say—" commenced the Colonel, hesitatingly—

"Colonel! Colonel! I will not descend," said his wife, "this is not a fit place for me to reside in—Kitty Diver must be insane to have engaged it."

"My dear! my dear!" replied her hus-

band, lowering his voice, "pray do not speak so loudly—we shall offend the people of the house; let me persuade you to get out for the present—remember that I have to return to Gravesend, and that you have had no dinner, and that we should hardly know where else to go to for to-day. Be persuaded to lodge here, at all events, for to-night, and to-morrow you can make what fresh arrangements you choose."

Mrs. Dowdson, notwithstanding her ill-humour, saw the sense of this proposal, and leaving the cab in high dudgeon, squeezed herself past her boxes, which were already blocking up the narrow passage, and was received by her landlady in a dingy little dining-room, furnished with dyed moreen of a sombre mulberry hue, and which, from having no fire in the grate, felt as cold as a cellar.

"Are these my apartments?" she enquired, with lofty dignity, as she gazed around her.

"Yes, Ma'am," replied the landlady, who was all smiles and curtsies; "this is the

parlour, with the bedroom next to it, and a room for your maid upstairs, all as comfortable and convenient as heart could wish for, as I said to Miss Diver, when she took them for you last week. And so you've come all the way from India, this morning! dear heart alive, if I'd known it you should have had a fire ready for you, but Miss Diver said it might be any day, and where was the use of wasting firing on an expectancy; but the girl shall light it up directly, Ma'am—and when would you be pleased to have your dinner?"

"At once!" said Mrs. Colonel Dowdson. "These are very different apartments from what I expected Miss Diver to prepare for me, but since she has made so gross a mistake, and we are in them, there is nothing to be done but to make the best of it for the present. Serve the dinner at once, if you please; the Colonel has to return immediately to Gravesend, to superintend the disembarkation of the troops."

"At once!" exclaimed the landlady, whose tone changed visibly with the slight

cast upon her apartments, "and where do you suppose, ma'am, I am to get a dinner to set before you at once? If you choose to bespeak anything in reason, you can have it in its proper time, but I don't keep a boarding-house nor yet an eating-house, nor are there any black slaves here, nor mullatters for to be commanded about at a moment's notice, whether they will or no," and folding her arms across her portly person, the landlady stood and regarded the lady from India portentously.

"And has Miss Diver ordered no dinner to be prepared for us?" enquired Mrs. Colonel Dowdson, in amazement.

"Not as I know of," replied the landlady, "I haven't seen Miss Diver since the day she took the rooms for you, and in my ideas it would have been much more reasonable if persons fresh arrived from off the sea had gone to an hotel to warm and feed theirselves, instead of coming all of a sudden to turn a quiet house upside down. I ain't used to such proceedings myself, and I can't say I approve them."

Saying which the implacable creature, whose milk of human kindness had been turned to curds by the first remark of her lodger, turned short round and stalked out of the apartment, calling to the girl on her way, to go up to the parlour, and if "they" had any further orders, to bring them down to her to the kitchen.

"My dear! I am really afraid that I must leave you," said the Colonel, who foresaw a coming tempest, and unmanfully thanked his stars that business called him in another direction. "Reed will be quite at a loss to know what to do without me, and indeed it is absolutely necessary that I should be present at the disembarkation of the troops. I shall get a mouthful on board, or at the station on my way, and you will see me again to-morrow morning. Meanwhile, I advise you to tell the servant just to get a little dinner ready for yourself and your maid, as soon as possible, and I daresay Kitty Diver will be round in the course of the evening, when you can have a chat together about these things. She has

been in London now for some time, and will be able to give you any information you may require about shops or provisions or lodgings. And when I come back, you can make what alteration you please."

So with a hasty farewell the prudent Colonel beat a rapid retreat, leaving Mrs. Dowdson indignant at the idea of requiring assistance in house-finding or house-keeping from Kitty Diver, or any other "creature," but very much inclined to weep, nevertheless, from wounded pride, and cold and hunger and fatigue combined. However, the fire was now crackling in the grate, and the domestic, rendered still dirtier by the operation of kindling it, was standing meekly by, waiting for orders, so that personal discomfort gained the mastery of Mrs. Dowdson's grandeur, and she condescended to ask the girl to let her have something to eat as quickly as it could be procured, which demand, after the lapse of another hour, produced two dishes of mutton-chops and beef-steak, accompanied by some watery

potatoes, to which rather unappetising repast Mrs. Colonel Dowdson was feign to sit down, whilst poor little Véronique, who was nearly fainting from fasting and weariness, was desired to carry her share of the dainties into the adjoining room, where she eat it on the lid of one of her mistress's travelling cases; to dine at the same table as a servant, even under the most untoward circumstances, being an indignity to which Mrs. Colonel Dowdson could never have submitted herself.

"I shall deny myself to Kitty Diver," said that lady, emphatically, as she wiped her mouth, and rose from table, "when Kitty Diver calls upon me, I shall send out word that I am too much engaged to see her."

There was no one but Véronique to listen to this spirited determination on the part of Mrs. Dowdson; but the mind of the latter was so completely filled with the baseness of Kitty Diver's conduct towards her, that it was a relief to censure it, even for the benefit of a servant who had never

seen her. But the individual in question did not give her friend an opportunity to carry out her resolve, for as the dusk was falling, a sharp ring sounded at the front door bell, and before Mrs. Dowdson had had time to expostulate against her admittance, Miss Diver pushed past Phillis in the passage, and was standing in the mulberry-tinted dining-room.

"Well, Mrs. Dowdson!" she exclaimed, cheerfully, "how are you? Welcome back to the old country! How thankful you must be to have escaped from that detestable Madras! I hope you like your apartments! How are you getting on with old Ball?"

The lady who poured forth this string of queries and ejaculations without waiting for a response, was a middle-aged person, small, sharp, and active-looking, who had made a journey out to Madras some years previously, ostensibly to keep the house of her brother, Captain Diver, in reality to see whether it were not possible to inaugurate an establishment of her own, and who

(having been disappointed in the latter expectation) had returned (with the exception of being a little thinner, a little sharper, and five years older) much as she went, but with considerably reversed opinions of the country which had proved so false a hope to her.

Whilst in Madras, Kitty Diver had been one of Mrs. Dowdson's most steady flatterers and insincere allies. She had permitted herself to be "poor Kitty," and "good Kitty," and "honest Kitty," with the Colonel's lady, until the latter had come to imagine that Miss Diver looked up to her as a subject to a reigning sovereign, and concluded, not unnaturally, perhaps, that she would find her as amenable to her playful discipline in England as she had been in Madras.

But Mrs. Dowdson had yet to learn (and a hard lesson it proves to some) that the mother country is not India, and that, as Mrs. Ball had neatly put it, there are no black slaves and "mullatters" here.

Miss Diver keeping the house of her brother in Vepery, and Miss Diver keeping the house of her brother in Pimlico, were two different persons. Under the first circumstances, policy had compelled to regard his welfare and her own shady prospects; under the second, she had no one to fear, no one to thank, and no one to regard but herself and him, which accounted for the entire freedom expressed by her voice and manner as she addressed the sometime awful Mrs. Colonel Dowdson, and the jaunty air with which she took that lady's hand, whether she would or not, and shook it in recognition of her welcome.

"Are you comfortable? I daresay you expected to see me before this, but I really couldn't get away. We have such a number of acquaintances in London now, and I had a succession of visitors this afternoon. Besides, I thought you would have plenty to occupy you in undoing your boxes and so forth, and that I should be wise to keep out of the way till it was well over, for you must know that ever since I returned from

that odious place, Madras, I have had a perfect horror of packing-cases, and cords, and straw, and all the paraphernalia of a journey."

Could this possibly be Kitty Diver, who in times gone by had never been able to say sufficient in praise of Mrs. Dowdson's adopted country, and who had repeatedly lamented that she should not be at hand to help her dear friend through all the troublesome preparation needful for a voyage to England? The Colonel's wife could hardly believe it, and yet there she sat, (having ensconced herself in an arm-chair by the fire), *in propriâ personâ*, rattling on without pause or hesitation, and apparently without the least idea that either her conversation or her presence was unwelcome.

"Dear me! who's that?" she exclaimed, as she caught sight of Véronique, "your lady's maid? why, what a chit! I suppose you brought her home for her passage-money. You'll find her a rather more expensive article to keep here than in India;

and, by the way, where is the poor dear Colonel? hard at work, I suppose. What slavery the army is! and how do you like your rooms, Mrs. Dowdson? I assure you it is no sinecure lodging-hunting for one's friends. I wore out a new pair of boots before I lit on these apartments."

"We think them exceedingly small," returned the Colonel's wife, loftily; it was almost the first time she had opened her regal lips to the new-comer, "and very different to what we had expected. And, indeed, had you taken the trouble to meet us at the station, Kitty Diver, as I quite thought you would do, and told me what sort of rooms these were, I should have requested the Colonel to take me to an hotel, until you had found us others. They are very inferior, as you must have known, to such as we have been accustomed to."

"Then I'm very glad I didn't meet you," replied Miss Diver, bluntly, "for to find better apartments in this situation, and at

this price, would be a simple impossibility. Why! you don't consider, Mrs. Dowdson, that you wished your rooms to be at the west end, and not to exceed three guineas a week, and I think I must have gone to fifty houses before I found these, and I thought them very reasonable. You must remember that the season will be here directly, when all the swells return to town, and rooms in this quarter are snapped up at almost any price; and as to meeting you at the station, I couldn't do it. Even had I been sure by which train you would arrive, I have too many occupations now to be able to leave home at a moment's notice," and Miss Diver shook out her skirts, and made sundry other little gestures indicative of a ruffled temperament.

"But there was not even a dinner prepared for us!" continued Mrs. Colonel Dowdson, in a tone of injury.

"My dear lady, these rooms were taken for you a week ago. You wouldn't have had me tell Mrs. Ball to keep a joint

of meat and et ceteras ready in the house against your coming, would you, when they are to be procured at a moment's notice in any part of London? Who was to know when you would arrive, or whether you would dine here or elsewhere? Good Heavens! we are not in India; you have but to say what you want here, and it is done. You must try and rub off a little of your rust now that you have come back to England, and put all the antiquated ideas that one gets in the 'benighted Presidency' out of your head. And now I really must go, for Harry has some friends in to supper to-night, and I promised him not to stay away too long. I will come and see you again to-morrow, or next day; but remember, if you want to change your apartments, you must find others for yourself, for I've had quite enough of it; but if you're wise, you'll remain where you are. Good-bye! my love to the Colonel!" and with a hasty shake of the hand, Miss Diver ran out of the room, leaving Mrs. Dowdson in a

state of surprise bordering on bewilderment.

To hear Madras abused, and the military service termed a slavery! to be told to "rub off her rust," and get rid of her "antiquated ideas," by Kitty Diver!—Kitty Diver! who had been proud to be seen driving by her side, and known as her intimate acquaintance,—was altogether too much for Mrs. Colonel Dowdson. Her dignity had suffered a great deal on board ship from the frivolity of Mrs. Reed, still more in the Custom House that morning, and at the hands of Mrs. Ball; but she had never received so sharp a setting down as from the mouth of her umqwhile toady, and she felt the affront in proportion to its unexpectedness.

How she wished in that hour that she had never resigned the proud position of "second in command" to the officers of the 99th M.N.I., nor consented to leave the place where she had reigned (or fancied that she reigned) a queen. As Mrs. Colo-

nel Dowdson thought on these things, and reckoned up her losses and her gains, she actually shed tears of chagrin and regret.

END OF VOL. II.

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